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# The secret six : a study of the conspiracy behind John Brown's raid.

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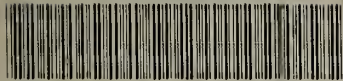
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THE SECRET SIX: A STUDY OF THE CONSPIRACY  
BEHIND JOHN BROWN'S RAID

A Dissertation Presented

By

JEFFERY STUART ROSSBACH

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 1974

History

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BEHIND JOHN BROWN'S RAID

A Dissertation

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The Secret Six: A Study of the Conspiracy Behind  
John Brown's Raid (May 1974)  
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A few days after New Year's in 1857 on a windy, bitter cold afternoon in Boston, a gaunt somber-faced man named John Brown appeared at the Bromfield Street offices of the Massachusetts Kansas Aid Committee. The gray-haired fifty-six year old had recently returned from Kansas where for over a year he had helped lead the violent struggle to prevent the imposition of slavery on that territory. Brown believed that force had to be used to prevent a proslavery takeover in Kansas and he came east seeking funds to further subsidize freestate military efforts. After introducing himself and presenting his references, the Kansas warrior was greeted by the committee's newly appointed secretary, young Franklin Benjamin Sanborn. Their meeting on that cloudy winter day began a three year relationship in which Sanborn became the "lynch-pin" of Brown's fund-raising activities in Massachusetts and New England. In fact, during the next few years Sanborn and five other prominent abolitionists, Theodore Parker, Samuel Gridley Howe, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Gerrit Smith, and George Luther Stearns would not only help Brown collect funds for Kansas but would also form a secret committee to subsidize his raid on Harpers Ferry. By March 1858 all six men were engaged in a conspiracy to provide supplies, arms and money for the old man's insurrectionary thrust at slavery. They supported Brown's plan to "make a dash" south, stir a vast and, if necessary, bloody slave uprising and then retreat

into a Virginia mountain fortress where other similar attacks might be prepared. By October 1859, the Six had given Brown 4000 dollars to begin the raid as well as 200 Sharpe's rifles and 200 hand guns.

But in spite of the fact that a record of the conspiracy can be accurately reconstructed from a number of historical sources, no full-scale analysis of why the members of the Secret Committee of Six, either collectively or individually, decided to support Brown has been undertaken. This dissertation seeks to begin a discussion of that question and in the process expand understanding of abolitionist class values, racial attitudes and notions of justified violence.

Immediately three problems present themselves. First there is the issue of the group's ambivalence toward violence. Despite their regard for Higher Law and their belief that it theoretically justified the use of violent means against slavery, none of the committeemen were ready to actually subsidize force when they met Brown in 1857. Yet by the spring of 1858 they made a tentative commitment to the use of force. This study examines how they resolved this ambivalence and moved beyond Higher Law for a justification of violence.

The second problem to face in examining the motives of the Secret Six is how to explain why six men who were so thoroughly imbued with a romantic racialist stereotype of the black man found it possible to support black insurrection. After all, if, as most of the committeemen agreed, blacks were

pliant, docile and "little addicted" to revenge, it seems unlikely Brown could have convinced them that slaves would make violent efforts for freedom. The question remains: how did the Six come to believe a race without vengeful emotions would or could fight for freedom?

Finally there is the problem of Brown's relation to the Six. Most historians talk about the personal and religious differences between the warrior and his associates. They see the link between him and the others only in terms of their mutual hatred for slavery. Whenever any historian ventures beyond this tie, Brown is portrayed as someone spiritually separated from his supporters--almost incomprehensible to them as a person. My research suggests a different conclusion. Brown's social character, his personality and values were quite comprehensible to the members of the Secret Committee of Six. Indeed it was on the basis of similar social values that the relationship between Brown and his committee associates was founded. These values have profound implications for the Six's willingness to commit themselves to violence and see the black man in other than romantic racialist terms.



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## INTRODUCTION

A few days after New Year's in 1857 on a windy, bitter cold afternoon in Boston, a gaunt somber-faced man named John Brown appeared at the Bromfield Street offices of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee. The gray-haired, fifty-six year old had recently returned from Kansas where for over a year he helped lead the violent struggle to prevent the imposition of slavery on that territory. Brown believed that force had to be used to prevent a proslavery takeover in Kansas and he came east seeking funds to further subsidize freestate military efforts. After introducing himself and presenting his references, the freedom fighter was greeted by the committee's newly appointed secretary, young Franklin Benjamin Sanborn. Their meeting on that cloudy winter day began a three year relationship in which Sanborn became the "lynch-pin" of Brown's fund-raising activities in Massachusetts and New England. And during those years, Sanborn, along with five other prominent abolitionists, Theodore Parker, Samuel Gridley Howe, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Gerrit Smith, and George Luther Stearns, would not only help Brown collect funds for Kansas but would also form a secret committee to subsidize his raid on Harpers Ferry. By March 1858 all six men were engaged in a conspiracy to provide supplies, arms, and money for the warrior's insurrectionary thrust at slavery. They supported Brown's plan to

"make a dash" into the South, stir a slave uprising, and then retreat to a Virginia mountain fortress where other similar attacks might be prepared.

When Brown's attack aborted in the fall of 1859 and he was captured in the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, all of the secret committeemen (except Higginson) burned significant portions of information which linked them to the scheme. Still, enough source material remains to suggest a number of factual conclusions about their conspirational activity on his behalf. We know that Brown formally revealed his plan to the Six in late February and early March of 1858, that he was able to calm their initial fears and quell their doubts during the next year and that by October 1859 he had received almost 4000 dollars from them to finance the raid. We know, too, that although the raid was originally scheduled for the late spring of 1858, it had to be postponed when a disgruntled associate of Brown's named Hugh Forbes threatened to reveal the whole scheme to influential political leaders in Washington D. C. It is also true that while all of the committee members didn't know all of the specific details of the proposed attack (they were shocked when Brown was trapped inside of the arsenal), at least four, Sanborn, Stearns, Smith and Higginson certainly knew when, where, how, and why Brown desired to begin his violent work. It is very probable Samuel Gridley Howe also knew these facts. Just ten days before the October assault Sanborn, Stearns and

Lewis Hayden, the leader of Boston's black abolitionist community, stayed awake all night outlining the plan to an erratic young man named Francis Merriam who was determined to join Brown's small insurrectionary cadre. In short, the factual record of the conspiracy can be accurately reconstructed despite the destruction of some documents.<sup>1</sup>

But up to now no one has attempted a full-scale analysis of why the members of the Secret Committee of Six (either collectively or individually) decided to support Brown's violent aim. While biographers of Brown and those who supported him have made some attempt to examine motive, no one has produced a detailed and probing examination of the reasons for the committee's activities. It is my belief that in failing to do so these historians have forfeited an important opportunity to assess abolitionist class values, racial attitudes and notions of justified violence.

There seem to be many reasons for this failure. The most prominent has to do with what Stanley Elkins called the "persistent rhythm" of rightness and wrongness which characterizes much historical writing on the issues of slavery and abolition. Most examinations of the men who formed the Secret Committee of Six spend far too much time justifying or chastising the conspirators for their activity and far too little time trying to assess and understand that behavior. Two historians who criticize the Six most severely are J. C. Furnas and Allan Nevins.

Furnas provides the most elaborate and censorious examination of the collective and individual motives of the Secret Six. He believes the conspiracy was nothing more than a "literary-flavored antic" by men who read too much for their own good. It was the most "bookish" conspiracy in history. Furnas feels the entire membership of the group was "stimulated by Scott, Byron and their imitators." They were obsessed with romantic tales of "God-minded, zeal-and-steel militants" who roamed England during the 1600's. In the process of this romantic identification, the Six forgot the "immoral aspects of disorder, violence, anarchy and murder." Furnas contends that all of the conspirators had a "Victorian zeal for romantic violence" which was both "ill-advised" and "insincere." They failed to develop "adult approaches" to the problem of ending slavery.<sup>2</sup>

Furnas is very dismayed by Thomas Wentworth Higginson who admitted his boldness came as much from a "love of adventure" and "boyish desire" for stirring experience as from "moral conviction." The historian censures Samuel Gridley Howe for the "ailment" of "daring-do-goodery" combined with "Yankee Scottery." Howe helped convince the other group members that Brown's plan was militarily "feasible," thus allowing the warrior to give enough details to keep the committee "confused but open-handed." Howe was "necessarily fascinated" by Brown's "steady glow" of emotion. Theodore Parker also backed Brown because he read Scott and had a

"backhanded fascination" with Byron. In addition, Parker's statements about Higher Law allowed him to rationalize Brown's violent "delusions." Parker was "infatuated" with Brown and saw him as a "self-elected exponent of Higher Law" who was determined to act out what the minister had been "demanding for a generation." Parker's relish of insurrection and willingness "to tempt . . . thousands of slaves to go out and get massacred" was "ill-conceived." Furnas brands Gerrit Smith a "self-dramatizing" millionaire who was addicted to causes and "guilt assuaging" subsidies of movements, and men. George Luther Stearns' passion for Brown stemmed from a "puzzling emotional-chemical affinity." According to the historian, it was Frank Sanborn's "talent for hero-worship" which attracted him to Brown and such a talent is "implicit in Byronic Scottery." When each of the members romanticism was coupled with Brown's ability to "snuff up the odor of blood righteously shed by the Chosen People," the Kansas Warrior gained "personal ascendancy" over the Six and made "fools of them all."<sup>3</sup>

Though hostile to the secret committee, Furnas admits that he is somewhat perplexed by the group's support of Brown and does not feel fully able to explain it. Allan Nevins is equally hostile and, seemingly, as equally perplexed. Nevins also sees Brown as gaining a "personal ascendancy" over the Six when he suggests that the warrior "awed" committee members. Awe, and the group's "deluded visions" of "widespread

slave insurrections" explains their support for Brown. Nevins also asserts the group hoped to "provoke war" by subsidizing the raid. And he chides them for a lack of "manliness" in dealing with Brown by noting that after the Forbes disclosures they continued to support the warrior but didn't want to know any more details of the plan. Nevins also scolds the Six for not making "creditable" efforts to save Brown once he had been captured.<sup>4</sup>

Those historians who are more charitable toward the Six and seek to demonstrate the moral rectitude of their support for Brown are led by Oswald Garrison Villard. Yet for all his belief in the correctness of the group's act, Villard seems quite as puzzled about motive. The historian's scholarly biography of Brown provided the first and most thorough documentation of the extensive nature of the conspiracy. But in spite of his painstaking accumulation of data Villard made little attempt to explain why these men attached themselves to Brown. He does suggest that the committee members were tremendously inspired by the warrior's "faith in himself" and were swept along by the man's ability to quell their doubts. Brown met their "every criticism" and always recommended a "plausible way out of every difficulty." Villard speaks of Sanborn as being "on fire for the antislavery cause and ready to worship any of its militant bodies." He says Stearns was "strongly impressed" with Brown's "sagacity." Parker supported Brown "vigorously" though unsure the plan

would succeed. By the end of his heavily-documented treatise, however, Villard still has not added anything substantial to his first hints about reasons for the committee's support of Brown. Indeed, in his conclusion he returns to the theme of inspiration as his basic explanation of motive. Brown "inspired" the Six and it was this "weapon of the spirit" which compelled them to support insurrection. The "secret" of Brown's influence was his spiritual power and the morality of his cause.<sup>5</sup>

Most biographers of the individual committee members support both of Villard's themes. They continually assert a belief in Brown's inspirational nature and imply that to know an act was morally justified is to know the fullness of motivation. Ralph Harlow speaks of Gerrit Smith's "continuous flow of enthusiasm" in the "cause of good works." Smith never allowed himself to be content with "normal routines" and enjoyed life when spiritual "demands came thickly upon him." He could hardly resist Brown's extraordinary scheme. Henry Steele Commager speaks of Theodore Parker's recognition of Brown as the recognition accorded a "kindred spirit."<sup>6</sup>

But both Commager and Harlow are troubled in their assessment of Brown and the Six even as they applaud them. Both men believe the group's act was justified but they, like many historians who praise the abolitionists for their valiant efforts on behalf of the black man, seem unsure about how to precisely assess the actual violence that was inherent



in Brown's scheme from the beginning. Commager says Parker and Brown both understood that slavery must be "settled . . . by the sword." Neither man was afraid of "a little bloodshed" or a slave insurrection. But Commager does not push the theme of Parker's belief in the necessity of violence too far. Actually, before this historian finishes his biography he suggests Brown was something more than a "kindred spirit" to Parker. Commager separates Parker from a belief in the necessity of force by invoking a form of Villard's "secret weapon"--spiritual power. He claims that Parker and the other committee members were not only inspired by Brown but were also "hypnotized." And, as if being hypnotized were not enough to absolve Parker of responsibility for death at Harpers Ferry, Commager introduces a second attenuating factor into the relationship of Brown and the Unitarian minister. He attempts to ritualize the conspiracy. Theodore Parker and his friends did not really intend to support bloody, violent insurrection, they were merely engaged in a "game." They "enjoyed . . . the hatching of plots, the secret meetings, the code . . . the purchase of arms, the tall talk and the rodomotode, matching Southerners word for word." The secret committee's relationship to Brown was, as C. Vann Woodward has also suggested, simply one big "conspirational drama."<sup>7</sup>

Ralph Harlow similarly portrays Gerrit Smith's commitment to violence. He admits that after 1854 the idea of

violence took a "firmer hold" on Smith because the philanthropist believed traditional American institutions were "incapable of fostering men for high and holy works." Yet the historian ascribes much of Smith's "acerbity of expression" about violent means to the "nagging physical pain" of his many physical ailments.<sup>8</sup>

Harold Schwartz's biography of Samuel Gridley Howe also reflects uncertainty about violence and seeks to portray the doctor's participation in the conspiracy two ways. On one hand, Schwartz says that Howe "never sanctioned illegal activity" and cannot be blamed for supporting Brown because he did not "fully realize" what the warrior had in mind. But Schwartz readily admits that in May 1858, when Brown's plan was postponed because of the threats and minor disclosures of Hugh Forbes, Howe rejected the idea of postponement and "urged Brown to proceed with his plans." When Schwartz isn't denying Howe's participation in the conspiracy he's rationalizing it. He asks us to believe that Howe's "advancing age" (the doctor was in his fifties) brought on "debility" and a failure of judgment. Howe had experienced many "great shocks" in his life, his "little world began to crumble," and he "lost all perspective" in evaluating Brown's character. Howe was "unwilling or unable to realize Brown was . . . irresponsible."<sup>9</sup>

Schwartz also produces another variation on a familiar theme. Howe and the others could not make a "clear judgment"

of Brown because Brown had an "electric" effect on them. This electricity prevented them from realizing that Brown was "a failure," a man of "proven instability," an "incompetant," and a "megalomaniac."<sup>10</sup>

There is some irony in the ambivalence these historians obviously feel about their subject's commitment to violence. For while each historian seems to feel that his subject's commitment to Higher Law implied both a theoretical and actual commitment to violence, my research suggests that such is not the case. Indeed, though none of the scholars admit it, the individuals they have studied were themselves ambivalent about the use of violent means. While all of the members of the Secret Six did (with varying degrees of intensity) espouse the use of force before Brown sought their assistance, none (except Higginson) had the practical will to use force to end slavery. They were ambivalent about the use of force when Brown proposed his scheme and for quite awhile afterwards. No doubt the Six were disillusioned with political abolitionism. No doubt they were facile in marshalling arguments to support the theory of justified violence. But all found the distance between theory and practice, idea and act to be very great. Anthony Burns, a fugitive slave who was arrested in Boston in the spring of 1854 and returned to slavery was partially a victim of Howe's and Parker's irresolution over the issue of supporting his forceful release. This ambivalence has a profound meaning for any analysis of

why the secret committeemen eventually decided to support Brown's effort. They not only had to be convinced of the warrior's ability to execute the scheme, his competence, but they also had to find a rationale that went beyond Higher Law if they were to justify their practical abolitionism.

The problem with these historian's examination of violence is that it focuses on the origins and justification of each individual's appeal to violence. Little attention has been paid to the nature of that appeal. For instance, no one asks whether Parker's repeated pleas for violence were meant to be taken literally or whether they were the purposeful rhetorical flourish of a masterful opinion-maker who was merely trying to jolt slumbering northern moral sensibilities. These historians do not ask whether the Six envisioned a purpose for violence beyond its use as a means to achieve the liberation of blacks from slavery. Nor, as I have previously suggested, has any careful examination been made of the distance between the group's theoretical justification of violent means and its practical will to personally or by subsidy implement such means. If we too readily accept the proposition that all committee members were theoretically dedicated to force and fail to question what that dedication meant in practice, we cannot possibly probe the complexity of their conspirational relationship. We cannot understand their attachment to a man who sought to both symbolize and actualize the violent overthrow of slavery.

Fortunately the two most probing and most sophisticated examinations of motive among the conspirators, Stephen B. Oates' biography of Brown, To Purge This Land in Blood and Tilden Edelstein's work on Thomas Wentworth Higginson entitled Strange Enthusiasm, have begun to grapple with the problem of violence. Oates begins his consideration of why the Six committed themselves to the use of violent means by suggesting that the six abolitionist committeemen saw violence as the "only solution" to slavery. They were imbued with Higher Law notions, believed all "peaceful alternatives" for ending slavery had failed and were convinced that black "revolution" must be attempted. War upon the South "could destroy the Slave Power conspiracy, eradicate slavery, and restore [the] nation to God and the ideals of Jefferson's Declaration." Oates also suggests that the committeemen believed that if the raid achieved only temporary success it would alter white racial conceptions, shock sectional tensions, stimulate slave convulsions and possibly provoke war.<sup>11</sup>

Edelstein says that the committee's devotion to black violence derived as much from the conviction that white attitudes about the slave's nature could be changed as from the hope that insurrection would totally destroy the institution in one convulsive episode. According to Edelstein, Higginson wanted Brown to destroy the northern belief that all blacks were as "submissive as Uncle Tom." Higginson was as

interested in having blacks fight their way out of a stereotype as he was in having them fight their way off the plantation.<sup>12</sup>

But neither historian pursues the notion of an altered racial image far enough. My own work suggests that Higginson and the others were interested in two freedoms for the southern slave: the freedom from and the freedom to. The Six wanted black men and women liberated from the debilitating environment of slavery and they also wanted that liberation governed by a prescribed social outlook. Black violence would free slaves, kill white slaveholders, encourage a change in white racial attitudes and, as important, begin to inculcate a particular set of values in the Afro-American. In theory Higginson and his colleagues always believed that justified violence and the willingness to fight for freedom were the keystone virtues of Anglo-American political, social, economic, and cultural life. By October 1859, they had come to believe (and were willing to subsidize acts based upon the belief) that assimilation of these virtues could put black men well on the road to attaining that superior culture. Assimilation could unleash the black man's potential for participation in the industrial, democratic, marketplace of the North. By October of 1859, the advocacy of violence by the six committeemen had fundamental class implications and had carried them beyond Higher Law.

Oates and Edelstein also begin to confront the whole issue of Brown's "spiritual" power. Oates flirts with a variation of the theme but does not quite embrace it. He is convinced Brown saw himself as an Old Testament Calvinist; a missionary who was God's providential instrument to destroy slavery. He believes that the six committeemen were impressed with Brown's "unbending conviction" of that instrumentality. But Oates does not say they were awed, hypnotized, electrified or in any other way paralyzed by the warrior's "spiritual power--only enthused by his religious conviction."<sup>13</sup>

Tilden Edelstein finally pulls the plug on the theory of Brown's "electric" attraction. His examination of the one individual supposedly most electrified by Brown, Frank Sanborn, fully demonstrates this. Far from viewing Sanborn as Brown's "orderly," Edelstein sees the young secretary as an ambitious, calculating, and cynically manipulative person whose actions suggest strongly that he used Brown as much as Brown used him. As I suggest more fully in my own analysis, Sanborn's support for Brown grew as much out of personal motives as out of selfless hero-worship.<sup>14</sup>

Like Oates, Edelstein also presents a far more balanced view of Brown than has emerged in previous research. Brown is seen as a man who depended as much on slyness as his ability to inspire and less on people's belief in his "spiritual power" than on a confidence in his business-like manner. When John Brown made his first plea for support of the

Harpers Ferry scheme in 1858, Edelstein shows how the wise old man "artfully played-off" his "key supporters" against each other. Edelstein does exempt Higginson from such manipulation (Higginson "shrewdly baited" Brown) but, generally his analysis has great merit and must be examined further if we are to understand the complexity of Brown's relationship with the Six.<sup>15</sup>

Edelstein has done more than cut through redundancy in historical interpretation by such views. He has stopped attempts to force Brown's relationship to the Six into basic incomprehensibility. Most scholars have overemphasized Brown's spiritual attraction, his moral and religious affinities because they have overlooked other fundamental personal and social values. This is not to suggest that Brown was not attractive to the committeemen because of his piety and religiosity. He was. But it is to suggest that there are many levels of attachment among men engaged in a common cause not all of which need have to do with the essential morality of that cause. The morality of the issue need not even be their primary attachment. And all of these levels must be plumbed if we are to have a chance at understanding.

My research indicates that in many ways other than spiritual, moral or religious Brown was very comprehensible to the committeemen. Indeed, the virtues he aspired to and values he recommended were the same as those of the secret committeemen. All of these men had internalized similar values



and manifested similar traits. Their quest for civic repute and professional achievement was precisely the quest of John Brown. Their search for place, security, order, and discipline amidst the chaos and instability of mid-nineteenth century America was as frenetic and anxiety-filled as his own. Furthermore, Brown knew how to appeal to this value system. He consciously displayed what the Six just as consciously demanded. The old man's years in the marketplace made him adept at negotiating business deals even if it didn't increase his ability to bring these transactions to a successful conclusion. If the group was intrigued with Brown it was as much the intrigue of Narcissus as that of Faust.

In recent years a number of historians have begun to define Brown's social personality and character. Ronald Story's analysis of this work in his essay "John Brown and the Injuries of Class" is a particularly insightful examination of these scholar's findings.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout his varied and disastrously unsuccessful career in the northern marketplace, Brown constantly preached about the values which should govern a man's life. He counseled his sons, friends, and all who would listen about how they should act. He was perpetually concerned with success and how to achieve it. Young men should learn "about business, about general subjects, and . . . the fear of God." They should be ambitious, frugal, ever on the lookout for their "main chance," and careful to husband funds which could

be put "out on interest." Eventually they would "employ others," Indeed, a "world of pleasure and success [was] sure" if one was "constantly attendant upon early rising." Brown's Poor Richard mentality frowned on those who squandered earnings. Men were not made to "idle away their time and learn lazy habits." Brown was full of uplift maxims and abstinent behavior. He was obsessed with his own neatness and cleanliness.<sup>17</sup>

Above all, John Brown was a family man. It was the source of his "utmost comfort." It made him feel secure to know he had a "warm place in the sympathies, affection, and confidence of my most familiar acquaintance; my family." A man could "hardly get into difficulties too big to be surmounted" if he had a "firm foothold at home." It was essential for Brown to have the social and economic sustenance of his family as he lurched from one failed business transaction to another.<sup>18</sup>

The virtues Brown aspired to and the values he recommended were "self-control, order, cleanliness, industry and ambition." Such values produced a "respectable, autonomous, God-fearing, accumulator with a subordinate nuclear family. . . ." And while this system may have been "modified" by the "intensity" of his "antislavery sentiment" and his "Calvinist piety," it did not change him radically" after Kansas. According to Story "whatever his [Brown's] immediate

objectives . . . [his] ideal person was always comfortably within the nineteenth century mainstream."<sup>19</sup>

Brown's values and those of his friends on the secret committee were produced by two dominant trends in northern ante-bellum society. The first was the emergence of a market economy which "rewarded (or seemed to reward) such traits." The second was the appearance of large groups in society [who] did not engage directly in the market place and did not have a similar mode of life." For Brown and the Six it was the "marketplace North with its burgeoning assertive middle class that served as the measure of the rest of society." The North was "virtually synonymous with its new middle class: a society of projecting, rootless individuals whose deepest values were, discipline, achievement, and the nuclear family."<sup>20</sup>

My research suggests that it is only by examining the relationship of Brown with the Six on the basis of these assumptions that we can break the persistent rhythm of rightness and wrongness Elkins speaks of. In this way we can add dimension to that relationship. In this way we can begin to appreciate more fully why the Six believed in Brown's competence and why they felt sure violence could instill the "proper" values in his black insurrectionist followers.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, there is the important matter of the Six's attitudes toward the black race. Recently, it has been correctly suggested that Higginson, Howe, Parker, and Smith were

imbued with a "romantic racist" image of the black man. They believed blacks were pliant, docile, and "little addicted" to revenge. Seemingly the basic difference between their stereotype and that of the slaveholder was that far from demanding the institutionalization of a paternalistic slave system, they believed such a nature was to be revered for its high degree of Christian virtue. Man, in theory, could have no greater aim in life than to be docile before Christ. My analysis of the Secret Six will deal with the tortuous trail each conspirator walked in attempting to square such racial imagery with the subsidy of black violence. The group's drift from romantic racialism to a budding conviction in the necessity and ability of slaves to fight is inextricably tied to their movement toward practical abolitionism and their belief in the assimilative value of black violence.<sup>22</sup>

## CHAPTER I

Deputy marshal Asa Butman paced nervously as he waited on the sidewalk across the street from Colin Pitt's clothing store. Attempting a fugitive slave arrest in Boston was never easy; trying it during Anniversary Week when hundreds of delegates were in town for the Anti-Slavery and Women's Rights conventions compounded the problem. Butman kept himself well hidden. He periodically checked the time and glanced down Brattle Street to see if his men were properly positioned. It had been a mild May day but now, as the sun set and nearby church bells struck five, a chill breeze began to stir.

Moments after five Colin Pitts and Anthony Burns, a black man he had recently hired, stepped out of the store offices and into the street. After a brief conversation, Pitts headed toward the corner of Brattle and Court Streets; Burns in the opposite direction. Butman panicked. Every day for a week, Burns had accompanied his employer and the deputy marshal positioned his men accordingly. Now the suspected fugitive was walking away from the trap set for him. It looked as if a day of waiting and week of investigating had been wasted. Suddenly, Burns stopped, turned around, and ran to catch Pitts. Butman jumped from his hiding place, signaled his men, and hurried across the street with

stiff-legged strides. When he reached Burns the deputy marshal identified himself and claimed the black man was wanted in connection with a robbery investigation. Before Burns could protest, Butman's deputies lifted him off his feet, held him horizontally above the ground in their out-stretched hands, and rushed to the Court House. Once inside the building, the suspected fugitive slave was carried up three flights of stairs and taken to the Jury Room where he was bound hand and foot and placed in a chair.<sup>1</sup>

About twenty minutes later, the door to the Jury Room opened. Butman accompanied Virginia slave owner Charles F. Suttle and his hiring agent William Brent inside. Obscuring Burns' view of the others in the room, Suttle faced Burns and asked him why he had run away. "I fell asleep on board the vessel where I worked and before I woke up she set sail and carried me off," Burns replied.

"Haven't I always treated you well, Tony?"

"You have always given me twelve and a half cents once a year," Burns said.

In the silence that followed this exchange, Butman blurted out, "Well that's the man is it?"

"Yes," replied Suttle. A moment later he and Brent left the room.<sup>2</sup>

After they left, Burns faced Butman and asked why the marshal had lied about wanting him in connection with a robbery. Butman smiled and replied that he was "afraid of the

mob." Burns turned away from his captor. He knew there would be a hearing to certify his identity and then he would be shipped back to Virginia. He anticipated harsh treatment and realized his ordeal had begun when the taunts of guards outside his cell prevented him from sleeping. They kept reminding him that Thomas Sims, a fugitive slave captured in Boston two years earlier, had occupied the same cell before being sent back to slavery. Ironically, if Burns had even a slight chance for freedom, it was because of the Sims rendition. The failure to stop Sims' return had stimulated Boston's abolitionist community to develop better methods for dealing with slave arrests. By early evening the Vigilance Committee of Boston was aware of Burns' plight and had begun efforts to prevent his return to Virginia.<sup>3</sup>

## II

At nine o'clock in the morning on May 25, 1854, Commissioner Edward Loring convened the rendition hearing of Anthony Burns. Famed novelist and Vigilance Committee lawyer Richard Henry Dana, Jr., was at the fugitive's side from the beginning of the hearing. He hoped to defend Burns. But after a night in jail and further reflection on what awaited him in Virginia, the captive felt defense counsel was "no use." He was certain to "fare worse" if he resisted rendition. Seconds after this refusal Dana was joined by two other committee members, Charles M. Ellis and Theodore Parker,

the well-known Unitarian minister. Parker immediately conferred with Burns and explained his appointment as minister-at-large for the Boston Vigilance Committee. He pressed Burns to accept counsel but the fugitive refused to reconsider his decision. Burns said he wanted to go back to Virginia "as easy as I can." Parker wouldn't yield. It was only "fear" which gave Burns such a "sad presentment" of his fate. No harm would be done by making a defense. Still Burns hesitated as Loring began the proceedings by summoning William Brent to give testimony. Then, just as Brent began to discuss the conversation which took place between Suttle and Burns in the Jury Room on the previous day, Dana interrupted. He notified the Commissioner that Burns had accepted counsel and strenuously objected to Brent's testifying before a proper defense could be prepared. Suttle's attorney, Seth Thomas was enraged. Thomas was certain that "the only object of those who sought delay was for public purposes of their own." Pandemonium broke loose in the court room and Loring repeatedly gavelled order. When calm was restored he asked the fugitive to approach the bench. What was his decision? Would he accept a defense? Burns glanced over his shoulder at Suttle and Brent, then at Parker and Dana, finally he turned to Loring and announced his desire for counsel. Loring called for order, postponed the hearing until Saturday, May 27, and dismissed the court.<sup>4</sup>



Theodore Parker was elated as he left the building and went home to await the Vigilance Committee meeting scheduled for two o'clock that afternoon. He felt great satisfaction at having convinced Burns to make a defense. After the humiliation of the Sims affair Parker repeatedly predicted Boston would become easy prey to federal authorities if slave "kidnappings" were not resisted. Powerful reaction to Burns' arrest would prove Boston was willing to resist unjust laws; willing to "fight manfully" for the freedom of slaves. Now was the time "to push and be active . . . call meetings, bring out men . . . agitate, agitate." Parker had been "waiting a long time for some event to occur which would blow so loud a horn it should waken the North." Seth Thomas was correct, Anthony Burns would serve "public purposes." If Burns' defense were handled properly the black man from Virginia might have his freedom. But whether Burns was freed or sent back Parker knew the incident could become a "start-ing horn" for a new wave of antislavery sentiment.<sup>5</sup>

Parker came late to the antislavery movement. It wasn't until the mid-1840's, some fifteen years after Garrison had launched the crusade, that he began to devote himself to the cause. However, once committed, he totally immersed himself in the work. The minister studied Roman slave codes, poured over census statistics, examined the economic indices of slavery, and read tracts which condemned the institution as well as those which justified it. He listened to the stories

of fugitive slaves living in Boston and consulted with free blacks like Lewis Hayden and Fredrick Douglas. By 1850, Parker relegated all other efforts to a secondary status. Abolition became his primary religious duty; absorbing all his passion and serving as a way to bring morality to an imperfect but perfectible world.<sup>6</sup>

Nor did Parker confine his activity to mere study or the preaching of sermons. He was convinced that men and women in the movement must act, as well as speak, in accordance with their beliefs. After the new Fugitive Slave Law appeared in 1850, he was instrumental in forming the Boston Vigilance Committee, an organization dedicated to preventing the return of slaves who fled to the city. During October of that year when William and Ellen Craft, two members of his congregation, were threatened with "kidnapping," Parker led a group of sixty vigilantes to the hotel where marshals charged with arresting the Crafts were staying. Without any physical violence, the group successfully intimidated the officers, drove them from the city, and protected the Crafts' freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Then, in April, 1852, Parker took an active part in the unsuccessful effort to prevent the rendition of Thomas Sims. He and other committee members never did settle on a plan to block the attempt and listened only skeptically as a young firebrand minister from Worcester, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, called for an attack on the Court House to free

Sims. Because of their indecision they were forced to witness Sims' return to slavery.<sup>8</sup>

Theodore Parker based his abolitionist efforts on a foundation of Higher Law. There was an infinite law existing before all time and stored in the intuitive recesses of man's soul which justified resistance to the great moral crime of slavery. Higher Law negated any and every man-made measure designed to preserve and perpetuate the institution of slavery. It impelled antislavery men to "help fugitives;" impelled them to "seek and save what is lost." But Parker had problems in attempting to apply this theory. By late May of 1854, the minister still hadn't determined the bounds or form of his own personal resistance to the "crime" of fugitive slave renditions. He was quite uncertain as to whether forcible means should be used in defense of black liberty. Theoretically men were justified in using such means. But the distance between theory and practice was great and it was one which Parker had not fully traversed.<sup>9</sup>

In 1850, the minister informed President Filmore that he was "not a man of violence." He had tremendous respect for the "sacredness" of life. If he resisted efforts to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law it would be "as gently as I know how but with such strength as I command." He vowed to serve as "head . . . foot or . . . hand to any body of serious and earnest men who will go with me with no weapons." When free blacks in Boston led by Lewis Hayden rescued a fugitive slave

named Shadrach in early 1851, Parker called it the "most noble deed done in Boston since the destruction of tea in 1773." However, he still shied away from personally committing himself to the use of force. He would "not . . . use force to rescue a man with. But go unarmed when there is a chance of success."<sup>10</sup>

By 1853, Parker's views had shifted slightly. When he lectured William Craft on the obligations of a husband, Parker suggested that if Craft was attacked and there was an attempt to force him back into slavery, he had "a natural right to resist the man to death." While Craft might refuse to exercise the right for himself, "his wife was dependent upon him for protection and it was his duty to protect her." It was a duty Craft "could not decline." Even in this admonition the minister was cautious when counseling the use of force. He warned against hatred and vengeful emotions--hating the man one struck "would not leave action without sin." This warning, when coupled with future actions, suggests that by May, 1854, Parker still had not resolved his personal debate about participating in forcible resistance to law.<sup>11</sup>

Parker was apprehensive as he prepared placards advertising the date and time of the Burns hearing. Surely forcible resistance would be demanded by some of the membership when the Vigilance Committee met that afternoon. How would he respond?

Some 200 members of the Vigilance Committee met in Faneuil Hall that humid, Thursday afternoon. Soon two plans commanded their attention. About twenty men spoke ardently for forcible rescue of Burns from the Court House. But the vast majority of the committee took a "wait and see" position. They didn't want to move until Commissioner Loring made his decision. Then, if Burns was to be returned, they could jam the streets, create a melee, and spirit the fugitive away. Logic supported the majority position. After all, it would be very difficult to force entry into a strong stone Court House which was sure to be filled with armed deputies. And even if the attack succeeded Burns might be hidden and not found during the brief possession of the building. By eight o'clock that evening, the majority plan was formally adopted. In addition, a public meeting was called for Friday night, May 26, in Faneuil Hall and a detail of men sent to watch the Court House. If there was any attempt to remove the black captive these committeemen would provide a warning. Proper planning and organization would prevent a repetition of the Sims affair.<sup>12</sup>

After the meeting adjourned the advocates of forcible rescue, and some of those in doubt such as Parker, remained in the hall and continued to discuss the feasibility of their plan. Parker, Wendell Phillips, Samuel Gridley Howe, Austin Barse, and William Kemp eventually formed an executive committee for the group. They decided to reconvene on Friday

afternoon and again debate the plan for forcible rescue. Though Partker had not committed himself to such means his membership on the executive committee indicates his continued willingness to entertain the idea of force. His experience with the Crafts, Sims, and now Burns, coupled with the intensity of his commitment to antislavery reform and the logic of his Higher Law doctrines demanded that he consider the use of force as a legitimate form of resistance.<sup>13</sup>

Parker's personal debate was also strongly affected by the militance of his young protégé, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, minister of the Worcester Free Church. Like Parker, Higginson came from a family that traced its ancestry back to the first families of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He was the son of Stephen and Louisa Higginson.<sup>14</sup>

Stephen Higginson came from a highly successful merchant family but had experienced personal economic misfortune during the War of 1812 because of bad investments and his own mismanagement. He eventually took a position as Treasurer of Harvard College but continued to be plagued by a poor organizational sense and the inability to handle accounts properly. Stephen Higginson never did regain the affluence of his early years and died soon after his youngest son, Thomas Wentworth, was ten years old. It was up to Thomas' mother, Louisa, to rally the family fortunes and provide for the children's education. She did a creditable job. Eventually, in 1837, her prodding,

Thomas' hard work, and family connections paved the way for his entry into the college. He was only thirteen.<sup>15</sup>

While at Harvard the ambitious young man distinguished himself. Thomas Wentworth was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and graduated near the top of his class. The grade-conscious young man seemed destined for great achievements. There was only one problem: Higginson was uncertain about what career he should apply his intelligence and energy toward. After graduation the gangling six-footer spent three years marking time as an unfulfilled schoolteacher trying to decide in which direction he should move. Finally, in 1844, he enrolled in Harvard Divinity School, prompted less by his own desire than by the urging of family (particularly his mother) and friends. They wanted him to begin satisfying the promise of his undergraduate days.<sup>16</sup>

Higginson's own uncertainty about a career as minister and the boring, rationalistic Unitarian theology taught at Harvard combined to totally alienate him from his studies. He concluded that as a minister he couldn't really be a "leader of men" and so left school at the end of his first year. He soon reconsidered his decision, however, after listening to Theodore Parker's address to that year's graduating class. The young scholar was astounded by the impact Parker's radical theology made upon his listeners. Parker's theology and the reputation he built as a minister fused Higginson's personal need to be "a leader of men" with

religious, romantic and reform elements. He went back to Harvard Divinity School and distinguished himself by graduating at the top of his class. Ironically, when Higginson gave the graduation address in 1847 on "The Clergy and Reform," Parker sat in the audience and marvelled at the speaker.<sup>17</sup>

Despite his commitment to religious life, Higginson's doubts about a ministerial career continued over the next nine years in a somewhat abated form. He continually questioned whether such a career was "worthwhile" or would give him "position and influence." His confidence in his decision to become a minister was severely challenged by his first congregation in Newburyport. Here he pumped for antislavery reform among men who made their living by trading with cotton planting slave owners and then added insult to injury by exchanging pulpits with Theodore Parker, a man shunned by virtually all established Unitarian ministers in the Boston area.<sup>18</sup>

While at Newburyport, Higginson did begin to earn a considerable reputation among Massachusetts reformers. He became very active in the Free-Soil campaign of 1848 and by the time he was forced to resign from his pastorate in 1850, was well-enough known to do a brief tour on the lecture circuit.<sup>19</sup>

Like Parker, Higginson saw the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law as contrary to the dictates of Higher Law. He



suggested that men and women of Massachusetts "disobey it" and show their "good citizenship" by "taking the legal consequences." His address "The Crisis Now Coming," written during the attempt to arrest William and Ellen Craft, advanced a more militant position than that of his mentor. Though he claimed to "abhor bloodshed," Higginson found it difficult to "say when a man must stop in defending his inalienable rights." To Higginson, the Shadrach rescue was not merely "a noble deed." The "issue of manliness" was too keenly involved. There wasn't anyone "of any real manliness" who did not in his "secret soul respect these colored men of Boston."<sup>20</sup>

Higginson put greater distance between himself and Parker on the issue of forcible resistance during the Sims affair. In a Vigilance Committee meeting he held the audience "spellbound" with an eloquent plea for active resistance to the law. Wendell Phillips was convinced Higginson had brought the group to the "eve of Revolution." And Parker realized the intensity of Higginson's convictions when the young minister planned with Austin Bearse to rescue Sims from the frigate Acorn. The two men wanted to try a pirate-like attack on the boat which was taking Sims back to Virginia. Nor did Parker miss the impact Higginson was making on many antislavery leaders by advocating such tactics.<sup>21</sup>

Thomas Sims' rendition upset Higginson greatly. He was bitter about the committee's failure to develop and execute

a rescue plan. Higginson was angered by "disorderly" meetings where each man advanced his "own theory." A fugitive slave arrest was an occasion which "required the utmost promptness and decision." It also required men to scrap "fixed rules" and "strive to do what seems best without reference to others." If commitment to Higher Law meant commitment to "bloodshed," Thomas Wentworth Higginson was ready to take the step.<sup>22</sup>

Just a month before the Sims rendition, in March 1852, Higginson began work as minister of the Worcester Free Church. The Free Church was a congregation organized on principles similar to those which governed Parker's religious society. In fact, Parker had argued for Higginson to take the position. At first, Higginson was reticent but he finally decided to accept the post and soon enjoyed a warm relationship with the men and women of his congregation. On Thursday, May 25, 1854, while preparing his sermon for that week, Higginson was notified of Burns' capture and the Vigilance Committee meeting scheduled for Friday evening. By early Friday morning he was on a train headed for Boston. As he rode to Boston, Higginson reflected on the Sims arrest two years earlier. He wondered if the committee would still be plagued by "great want of preparation" for their "revolutionary work." He wondered if the men of the committee could ever disobey law. Like himself, they had been brought up to respect law. It had taken the "whole experience" of the Sims case to educate

his mind "in the attitude of revolution." He wondered how others had been affected by the episode. For Higginson it had been "strange to find oneself outside established institutions, to be obliged to lower one's voice and conceal one's purposes, to see law and order, police and military on the wrong side." Had Parker, Phillips, Howe and the others been affected the same way? Did they really understand the necessity of force? Were they as ready as he to prevent Burns return by any means? He wondered.<sup>23</sup>

The Worcester activist arrived in Boston just before noon and soon learned of the executive committee meeting called the previous evening. He attended the meeting, asked that Martin Stowell's name be added to its membership, and hinted that Stowell was bringing men from Worcester to attempt a forcible rescue. Because Higginson couldn't give any details about the plan before consulting with Stowell and because the executive committee had not developed any plan of its own, the meeting was adjourned. They decided to meet again in the anteroom of Faneuil Hall a few minutes before the eight o'clock assembly. If Stowell did have a plan, it could be discussed then.<sup>24</sup>

Around six o'clock Higginson went to the train station. There he met Stowell and a few men he brought with him from Worcester. Stowell immediately outlined his rescue plan. He wanted an attack launched on the Court House in two stages. First Higginson, he, and his men would storm the doors of the

Court House. They would be reinforced after the initial charge by the large crowd slated to attend the evening meeting at Faneuil Hall. A great deal depended on the speakers who were addressing the assembly. It was up to one of them to incite the crowd and send them rushing to the Court House. Stowell realized the precariousness of the plan. He realized how important it was for Higginson and himself to coordinate their efforts with the speakers. He realized timing would be delicate. It was absolutely necessary that the Faneuil Hall crowd arrive moments after the first stage of the attack began. But Stowell was sure it could be done. Higginson thought so too.<sup>25</sup>

The two men hurried to meet with the executive committee members and outline their proposal. When they unveiled the scheme Austin Bearse immediately rejected it. William Kemp liked it but claimed he couldn't help because he wasn't scheduled to speak. Phillips was scheduled to address the assembly but couldn't be found because he was busy with last minute preparations for the gathering. Only Parker and Howe, both of whom were to speak, could assist. These two men listened incredulously as Stowell and Higginson discussed the planned rescue effort. Howe and Parker weren't sure of the scheme's chances and seem to have been a bit confused about their own role in it. But neither vetoed the plan. As a result, Higginson and Stowell left the anteroom meeting believing they could depend on one of the two (most likely

Parker) to send the crowd rushing to Court Square. Higginson and Stowell were also heartened by Lewis Hayden's promise to send ten blacks to assist the first stage of the attack. Minutes after they left the hall, the two Worcester activists strolled around Court Square checking to see that everything was ready for the assault. As they did, Samuel Sewall introduced George Russell to the large assemblage at Faneuil Hall.<sup>26</sup>

After Russell welcomed the audience, Samuel Gridley Howe stood up to read the resolves of the meeting. Howe was well-known to Massachusetts citizenry as the founder of Perkins School for the Blind. He was a close friend of Parker's and helped found the Vigilance Committee. Whenever a fugitive slave arrest was attempted, Howe stood right along side his friend Parker in efforts to prevent it. He smiled warmly and acknowledged the applause which greeted him as he stepped to the rostrum. Actually, Howe was quite tense as he prepared to introduce the resolutions. He was beginning to realize the implications of his meeting with Higginson and Stowell moments earlier. Yes, he believed in Higher Law and knew that unjust laws must be resisted but like Parker he had always stopped short of personally participating in acts of violent resistance. Why had he assented to the Higginson-Stowell plan? It could mean bloodshed.

Only half-concentrating on the resolves, Howe's mind was flooded with memories of past fugitive slave rescue efforts

and he vainly wrestled with the question of forcible resistance. His thoughts drifted as he mechanically called out the resolutions.

"Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God . . ."

Eight years before, Howe stood in Faneuil Hall and addressed a gathering of abolitionists on the necessity of preventing the rendition of fugitive slaves. At the beginning of his speech he assured the audience that he did not propose to "move the public mind to any expression of indignation--much less acts of violence." Yet during the speech he could not contain his anger and suggested law would "not prevent" the "outrage" of kidnapped slaves. Despite such anger Howe did not take the final step. He veered away from outright suggestions of violent resistance in his conclusion by claiming that renditions could be prevented if citizens fixed their "eyes upon him [the slave hunter]" and didn't take them off until "he leaves our borders without his prey."<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the early 1850's Howe continued to struggle with the notion of violent resistance. He began to believe law could do great harm to men. When Horace Mann asked him what he thought of legislation prohibiting corporations from employing people for more than ten hours a day, Howe replied heatedly that he was against the proposal. Law emasculated men. It prevented them from protecting themselves and inured them to their own responsibilities. But this distrust of law

and his recurring contention that nothing could truly become law that could not "answer the eternal principles of right" didn't help the doctor resolve the debate inherent in his first speech against the Fugitive Slave Law. For all his conviction about the transcendence of Higher Law, the evil of the Slave Power, and justice in protecting escaped slaves, he still could not accept shedding blood in the resistance to unjust laws. He could not bring himself to participate in actual violence.<sup>28</sup>

As he pronounced the words of the last resolution and sat down, Howe knew his approval of the Higginson-Stowell plan meant very little. He personally would do nothing to incite the crowd. No matter what his theories, he could not abet violent resistance. He was horrified by the thought of what might happen in Court Square at any moment.

The next speaker was Wendell Phillips. He rose, stepped to the rostrum, and was greeted by an enormous ovation. Phillips knew nothing of the rescue plan and spoke temperately. He suggested only that people turn out on Saturday morning at nine o'clock to show that Anthony Burns had "no master but his God."<sup>29</sup>

At Court Square, Thomas Wentworth Higginson heard the roar go up from Faneuil Hall. He realized the ovation must be for Phillips since he was scheduled as the first major speaker. Higginson also reasoned that it would be best to delay the attack until it was Parker's turn to speak.

Phillips had not been informed of the plan and there was no way to be certain that Howe or Parker had approached him before he gave his speech. The ovation that greeted Parker would cue their attack. Higginson and Stowell drew the men together, passed out a dozen hand axes, readied the huge wooden beam they were going to use as a battering ram against the Court House doors, and waited patiently. At that moment Lewis Hayden appeared with ten blacks. Everything was going as scheduled. It was all up to Parker. He must trigger the emotions of the crowd and send them to the Court House. Higginson was confident. If anyone knew how to arouse an assembly it was Theodore Parker.<sup>30</sup>

After Phillips' speech Parker stepped nervously to the rostrum. Higginson's revelations a few minutes earlier had been startling and a bit confusing but Parker was fully aware of the scene about to be acted out in Court Square. What is more, he knew the importance of his role in the scheme. He was the only major speaker with prior knowledge of the planned attack. It was up to him to incite the crowd and send them rushing toward the square. When Higginson first revealed the plan Parker was certain he could assist. Now, that certainty faded as his persistent doubts about using forcible means returned.

Parker began his speech auspiciously and with a taunt, addressing the assembly as his "fellow subjects of Virginia." Shouts of "No!" "No!" greeted his words. After these



inflammatory remarks, Parker referred to the Sims capture and claimed that "if Boston had spoken then, we should not have been here tonight." Yes, the people of Boston were "vassals" of Virginia and federal authorities were so confident of this that they hadn't even bothered to chain the Court House. They had no fear of Burns being rescued. Boston's submissive behavior would allow the police to carry Burns off "in a cab." Again, the crowd roared back. "No!" "They can't do it!" "Let's see them try!" Parker exhibited a masterful control of the assembly. Actually, this was the only kind of violence he really understood. It was a vicarious form, purely rhetorical, rising out of the mix of his own incendiary words and the crowd's emotions. First, he built the crowd's confidence by involking "higher law." Then, he advised them of the power of public opinion. He claimed there was only one law--"slave law"--and it was everywhere. Next, he spoke to them of "another law," one that was in their "hands and arms." They could put such law into effect whenever they saw fit. Parker challenged the crowd and shoved them toward violence. He was a "peace man" but realized "there is a means and there is an end, liberty is the end, sometimes peace is not the means toward it." With these words Parker seemed to be condoning violence, seemed to be resolving his own personal debate over participating in forcible resistance. As he spoke, he fed and was fed by the

rampaging emotions of the crowd. They were ready to charge the Court House and he was ready to send them.<sup>31</sup>

But in the very next moment his power, control, and commitment drained away like fine sand from a tightly clenched fist. It began when he asked the crowd what they planned to do about Burns. "Shoot!" "Shoot!" a voice cried out. Parker was stunned. Words caught in his throat. In an instant he realized his desire for action was far less intense than his fear of bloodshed. He couldn't send the crowd to Court Square. He must restrain them. "There are ways of managing this without shooting anybody," he yelled. "These men who have kidnapped a man in Boston are cowards . . . if we stand up there resolutely and declare that this man shall not go out of the city of Boston without shooting a gun, then he won't go back." In his next sentence he forfeited any chance of forcible rescue that evening. "Now I am going to propose that when you adjourn, it be to meet in Court Square at nine o'clock." Parker had abandoned Stowell and Higginson. He took refuge in the majority plan of the committee. But before he could carry his own motion, cries rang out. "Let's go tonight!" "Let's pay a visit to the slave-catchers at Revere House." Desperately trying to prevent an exodus to Court Square, Parker seized upon the last suggestion and tried to send the crowd to the Revere House. "Do you suppose to go to Revere House tonight?" "Then show your hands." After counting those who supported the measure,

Parker claimed it was "not a vote." Again, Parker suggested meeting in Court Square at nine in the morning. Again his motion was met by screams of "Tonight!" "Tonight!" Parker paused for a moment then hesitantly called for a vote. Half the assembly wanted to go to the Court House that evening. What could he do now? Shouts of "To the Court House!" echoed around the hall. Parker was at the mercy of the crowd he had totally dominated only moments before.<sup>32</sup>

Sensing Parker's plight, Wendell Phillips leaped to the rostrum and yelled out, "If I thought it could be done tonight I would go first. I am ready to trample any statute or any man under my foot to do it. But wait until daytime . . . . It is in your power to lock up every avenue so the man cannot be carried off." Moments after he uttered these words and the crowd seemed to settle down, a man burst into the hall. He screamed incoherently about an attack on the Court House. Everyone shoved and pushed for the doors of the hall.<sup>33</sup>

When Higginson heard the ovation that greeted Parker and the clamor caused by his introductory remarks, he felt sure the crowd would soon be on its way to Court Square. Now was the time to attack. On Higginson's signal several men extinguished street lamps and darkened the square. Then, with Higginson headmanning a large battering ram, the small cadre moved toward the center entry of the west side of the Court House. Burns was in a room two floors above this entry. As

the minister moved through the square and up the steps toward the doors he recalled words he'd spoken that afternoon. Some attempt to rescue Burns had to be made. If it wasn't, "future cases would occur with less traces of manly feeling." Once up to the door, Higginson and the black man who stood opposite him guided the thrusts of the battering ram. Standing behind those who were manning the beam, other members of the group shouted and hurled rocks through the windows of the building. A few of the attackers slashed away at the doors with hand axes. In the midst of this furor Higginson glanced furtively into the square. He wondered what was keeping the crowd from Faneuil Hall.<sup>34</sup>

Fifty "special" guards recruited by United States Marshal Freeman pressed against the inside of the Court House doors hoping to prevent them from giving way. But repeated thrusts of the battering ram buckled the door paneling. A few of these "specials" stepped back from the door, drew sabres and firearms, and prepared to repel any attacker who managed to get inside the building. Higginson and his black cohort were the first to squeeze through the small passageway in the paneling. Once into the building, they began grappling with some of the deputies. In the melee, shots rang out, deputy James Batchelder was mortally wounded, and a flashing cutlass dug into Higginson's chin. At the same time, Higginson realized that only he and his black friend were fighting, the rest of the attackers had already

retreated. He drew back and shouted at his fleeing comrades, "You cowards, will you desert us now." He was bleeding profusely and moved slowly down the steps. At that moment, the crowd from Faneuil Hall arrived only to see the battered Court House doors slammed shut. Amid the confusion of milling people, Higginson haltingly staggered away from the square. Within hours he was on a train headed back to Worcester.<sup>35</sup>

At first, Higginson was deeply disheartened by the attack's apparent failure. But he soon revised his opinion of the effort. Public excitement in Worcester stimulated by the attempt thoroughly amazed him. He heard the "wildest things" proposed by men who formerly had little or no anti-slavery sentiment. Even they wanted Burns freed. The minister began to understand the potential power of the concerted popular feeling illicited by his act. What to do with this power, however, was as new and mystifying as the exhilaration he felt in breaking down the Court House doors. But in any case, he was now "thankful for what had been done" and considered the whole effort the "greatest step in antislavery which Massachusetts had ever taken." Conveniently forgetting the successful Shadrach rescue by Boston blacks, the leader of this "greatest" of all acts was "ready to do my share again."<sup>36</sup>

Samuel May, Jr., wrote a letter a few days later which dampened his enthusiasm. May notified the young minister

that a warrant had been sworn for his arrest. But what upset Higginson more, was May's suggestion about Parker's conduct during the episode. According to May "Friday night had a chance of success but the Court Square movement right in the face and eyes of Faneuil Hall advice was ill-advised and so failed when with perfect harmony it might have succeeded." As more information filtered in to Worcester about Parker's speech, Higginson began to understand why the crowd arrived so late. He was tremendously disappointed with Parker.<sup>37</sup>

### III

It has been argued that Theodore Parker was one of anti-slavery's most renowned "moral agitators." Indeed, he was. Parker was always ready to "nullify the laws of slavery because they stultified the Higher Law." But more than one account of Parker's fugitive slave activity also implies that he not only theorized the overthrow of slavery by violent means but was ready to personally implement those theories. A careful examination of the Burns affair and Parker's role in it suggests another conclusion: Parker had not committed himself to anything more than the theory of forcible means. His fugitive slave efforts had not radicalized him to the point of practical commitment to the use of force. A tremendous tension existed within him between theory and practice both before and after the Anthony Burns episode. He

would not begin to resolve this tension for another three years.<sup>38</sup>

Samuel Gridley Howe faced a problem similar to Parker's. He shared responsibility with Parker for failing to send the crowd to aid Higginson and guiltily watched the rendition proceedings unfold. First, there were rumors of another rescue attempt. Then, Dana's plea for postponement was followed by an attempt to purchase Burns' freedom. Finally, with soldiers stationed at all windows, crowds milling in Court Square, and women abolitionists led by Lydia Parker standing vigil outside the Court House, the hearings began on Monday, May 29, at nine in the morning. Dana conducted a brilliant defense but his efforts were futile. Suttle, Brent, and Thomas certified Anthony Burns' identity and proved ownership. Commissioner Edward Loring defined his responsibility in the case as "ministerial" and not "judicial." He claimed he was not empowered to preside over a jury trial aimed at testing the validity of the Fugitive Slave Law. As long as proof of identity and ownership had been established, Loring said he had no choice but to turn Burns over to Suttle for shipment back to Virginia.<sup>39</sup>

On June 2, thousands of men, women, and children thronged the streets of Boston to watch Anthony Burns march from the Court House to the wharf for transportation to Virginia. The march was scheduled to begin at eleven o'clock but was delayed three hours as hundreds of soldiers attempted

to clear streets and prevent any further effort to free the slave. Cavalry patrols drove citizens back on to sidewalks. Police suggested businessmen close their stores for the day. Militiamen locked arms and held back the crowd. Once these "path-clearing" efforts had succeeded, Burns was surrounded by a column of 125 special deputies and 140 United States troops and marched to the wharf.<sup>40</sup>

Standing at the edge of the crowd on one of the streets en route, Samuel Gridley Howe watched the troops pass by with Burns in their midst. He saw black-edged flags, unions down, hanging everywhere. A coffin with the words "Funeral of Liberty" inscribed on it hung from a window opposite the Old State House. Howe was overwhelmed with anger and self-recrimination, disturbed at having glibly theorized about the necessity of using forcible means and then personally failing to execute such theories. Howe remembered a suggestion he made to Sumner only a few weeks earlier. At that time, he claimed that force might be "the only means . . . to save the perishing." Now, the full implication of his failure to act was clear: Burns was being shipped back to slavery. Howe "wept for sorrow, shame and indignation."<sup>41</sup>

Again and again the physician asked himself why he and so many others had failed to resist the rendition. Howe tried to convince himself that if it had not been for "citizen soldiery and armed citizen police, the people would have routed the United States troops and rescued poor Burns."



Ultimately he concluded that it was "the fetish of law which disarmed and emasculated" both himself and Boston's citizenry. Higginson was correct. It was difficult to find oneself on the wrong side of established institutions when one had been raised to respect those institutions. Howe had not been radicalized by the Sims affair. Unlike Higginson he was not ready to "burst down a door."<sup>42</sup>

In his self-anger, Howe was struck by a vivid image which eventually had much to do with his personal ability to break through the crippling "fetish" for law. The image was that of "a comely colored girl of eighteen" who happened to be standing near him as Anthony Burns passed. She stood watching the column with "clenched fists . . . flashing eyes and tears streaming down her cheeks, the picture of indignant despair." When he noticed how emotionally upset the girl was, Samuel Gridley tried to comfort her. He told her not to cry. Burns wouldn't be hurt. Immediately, the black girl turned to him and screamed, "Hurt, I cry for shame he will not kill himself. Oh why is he not man enough to kill himself." Howe was stunned by the vehemence and power of her words. In future days, he thought of the incident again and again. By 1858, the issue of black manhood and the necessity of black violence would allow Samuel Gridley Howe briefly to resolve the paralyzing tension between the theory and practice of legitimate force. It would carry him and others beyond Higher Law.<sup>43</sup>

The Burns rendition is a significant episode in the chronicle of the antislavery movement. It is especially important in understanding the attitudes of Howe, Parker and Higginson toward the use of force, and it provides a context for their future activities in the movement. Higginson moved rapidly down the road of practical abolition as a result of his participation in the assault. The failures of Howe and Parker accentuated their personal struggle to resolve the discrepancy between the theory and practice of forcible resistance.

But for all his commitment to violent means, Higginson was still a novice when it came to using the public sentiment his attack produced. In this respect, he learned much from Howe and Parker who were sophisticated practitioners at the art of manipulating public opinion. Neither Howe nor Parker could bring themselves to use forcible means but both knew how to milk the emotion stirred by the Burns affair. When it came to exploiting the "martyrdom" of Anthony Burns or promoting a crisis mentality in the populace, each man was an expert; quite as unscrupulous in the name of Higher Law as slaveholders were in defense of their institution. Both men knew how to win converts to the antislavery faith and their activities in the aftermath of rendition are as important for understanding their future abolitionist efforts as is their failure to forcibly resist the Fugitive Slave Law.

## IV

Parker used his Sunday sermons as a device to relieve himself of responsibility for the Burns failure and to whip up popular anger about the rendition. In his May 28 discourse, given only two days after Higginson's attack, he spoke of such attempts as "wholly without use." Then, he deftly side-stepped blame for the crowd's failure to reinforce Higginson by praising Wendell Phillips. According to Parker, it was Phillips whose words "hardly restrained the multitude from going and by violence storming the Court House." Parker didn't mention that Phillips was only trying to do what he himself could not.<sup>44</sup>

The Sunday after Burns had been returned Parker was less restrained with his remarks. He incited his audience by speaking with disdain about Massachusetts' failure to act. "We deserve all we have suffered. We are the scorn and contempt of the South. They are our masters and treat us like slaves. It is ourselves who made the yoke." Parker wondered aloud if men would always come to a rendition "with only the arms God gave," then claimed to want "no rashness," only calm considerate action.<sup>45</sup>

While Sunday sermons had their effect, other techniques were also necessary to maintain aroused antislavery sentiment. Soon after the rescue attempt Howe had written to Parker saying "I have long made up my mind not to avoid a

struggle with this law--perhaps my children are the reason [I have avoided the struggle]. . . . Something must be attempted." No new rescue effort was made. But soon after rendition Howe was again writing to Parker with a suggestion. Confessing his feelings of "disgrace," Howe thought one way to redeem the honor of the "degraded community" of Boston and at the same time feed antislavery emotion, was to remove Commissioner Edward Loring from his position as Judge of Probate. Parker received the idea with glee. He had already begun the process of discrediting Loring by suggesting that it was the Commissioner who was responsible for deputy James Batchelder's death. Nothing could be done about Loring's federal appointment but his position as Judge of Probate was subject to state recall proceedings. Such an issue would certainly sustain antislavery sentiment while at the same time shifting attention from antislavery violence and the failure to prevent rendition. Such a tactic personalized the institution of slavery in negative terms as Burns had personalized it in positive ones. Commissioner Loring became the institution of slavery; his removal the symbolic triumph of antislavery men over the institution. Loring's ordeal would be another lesson in antislavery's continuing struggle to win the public mind of the North. Undoubtedly Parker recalled the words he spoke in the aftermath of the Sims rendition. Seeking to locate responsibility for Sims' return, the minister wished "it was some single man . . . some

official of the City . . . so we could make him a scapegoat of public indignation."<sup>46</sup>

The effort to make Loring a "scapegoat" began on July 4 at an abolitionist picnic in Framingham. A petition was circulated calling for Loring's removal as Judge of Probate. By early February, 1955, the effort began to succeed. Indicative of the hostility generated against Loring was the defeat of his appointment as permanent lecturer at Harvard Law School. Then, in late February, the House of Representatives began hearings on the removal petition. Loring was accused of conducting the examination of Burns unfairly, hurrying the proceedings, and not maintaining free access to Court for the prisoner's counsel. Loring defended himself by protesting that he had handled the proceedings impartially and by reminding the legislative committee that his duties as Commissioner were not incompatible with those he rendered as Judge of Probate. If they were, why hadn't objections been raised when he was appointed Commissioner? Despite his forceful plea, Loring's position was in jeopardy when the hearings were recessed in late March. But he was soon receiving support from an unexpected source.<sup>47</sup>

Richard Henry Dana, Jr., was profoundly disturbed by the effort to remove Loring. He had hoped the whole Burns episode was behind him. It had been a painful experience. Now he was forced to rekindle unpleasant memories because he had decided to testify in Loring's behalf. While Dana condemned

the Commissioner's decision as morally wrong, he defended Loring's actions on the basis of the legal principles involved. Dana argued convincingly for the independence of the judiciary. If Loring were removed judicial independence would receive a severe blow. Dana believed Loring was not guilty of official misconduct. In fact, he had encouraged Burns to make a defense and had postponed the hearings long enough for counsel to make adequate preparation. The Commissioner had demanded Phillips and others be allowed free access to court. Loring had even cooperated with efforts to purchase Burns' freedom.<sup>48</sup>

Dana's defense of Loring seems to have been effective. Although the legislature voted for removal, Governor Gardener vetoed the measure. It would be three more years before abolitionists succeeded with their campaign to remove Loring.<sup>49</sup>

Theodore Parker was furious with Dana. He was certain the lawyer's influence had destroyed the removal effort. This, coupled with Dana's condemnation of Higginson's Court House attack, led the minister to claim he had long "despised" Dana's scruples against violence and was "disgusted [when] Dana withdrew fr[om] the Vig[ilance] Committee because of contempt for the use of force." Considering his own role in the affair, Parker's criticism was tainted. But his vehemence is also suggestive. It implies the importance he placed on the removal tactic and the intensity of his own personal debate about the use of violent means.<sup>50</sup>

Higginson's lack of sophistication in exploiting the Burns' incident is indicated in his first Sunday sermon on the subject. "Massachusetts in Mourning" is more a projection of his own new level of consciousness than a propaganda device. Delivered just two days after Burns had been extradited, the sermon was primarily devoted to the truths he personally hoped to live by in the future. It was his first formal declaration that slavery could only be ended by resorting to "physical force." Slave laws would not be repealed by politicians, only by "ourselves." Higginson claimed to have "lost the dream that our land is a land of peace and order." To "always . . . obey . . . laws" meant "virtue must relax much of her vigor." In a land where slavery was "national," law and order "must constantly be on the wrong side." He wasn't discouraging "peaceful instrumentalities"--politics should be used if they could be made "worth using." But Higginson was suggesting that as far as he was concerned the Burns episode signaled the beginning of "a revolution," a period of vast upheaval when appeal would have to be made to violent means if the complex institutional interaction which perpetuated slavery was to be destroyed. Perhaps the most personally revealing segment of his sermon was his vision of the result of such a revolution. Higginson believed the forthcoming crisis would remedy a "deeper disease" in American society than even the institution of slavery. Mid-nineteenth century society had grown "selfish

and timid." Men tried to save themselves by "law and order" and Higginson considered such efforts "idle." Men were not perfected by "talk of liberty." They were not made virtuous if they never had to risk physical injury to achieve liberty. Without "physical habits" minds would grow sharp but "bodies and hearts" were left "untrained." Mid-nineteenth century Americans had lost the strength and conviction of their forefathers, their society declined because they were "taught they owe the world nothing and the world owes them a living." This was the "deeper disease" in his society. This was the source of slavery and every other impediment to progress and perfection. In a short time Higginson would ride the plains of Kansas and marvel at the way war disciplined men and women and made them unselfish. He would become more convinced of the necessity of "revolution."<sup>51</sup>

Higginson wasn't very active in the Loring removal effort. For the most part, he just watched and learned. Besides, more immediate personal concerns demanded his attention. He was stung by the adverse reaction to the rescue attempt voiced by a number of antislavery proponents. Then too, his pending trial demanded time and energy. But any feelings of anxiety about imprisonment were soon dissipated when he realized what a fragmentary case had been constructed by the state. Only one person could identify him as a participant in the attack and that individual was unsure of his testimony.<sup>52</sup>



Eventually a growing confidence in the certainty of his own acquittal and new insight into the techniques of manipulating popular opinion convinced him that this trial might serve the same tactical purpose as the Loring removal. It could be an "additional stimulus" to antislavery sentiment. Realizing the others arrested in connection with the attempt were "obscure men," Higginson hoped his new found reputation would make his indictment a lesson. He began to relish arrest. He even considered the possibility of pleading guilty and asking acquittal on moral grounds. But he dropped such notions once he received expert legal advice and started listening to Wendell Phillips whose theories on popular opinion governed even Howe and Parker. Phillips was still smarting from the Faneuil Hall episode when he wrote to Higginson a few weeks later. He was upset that he had not been "given a chance to help . . . instead of making a fool of myself." Phillips advised Higginson (in rather cynical terms given Burns' rendition) that he must plead not guilty because "the opportunity of preaching to that jury is one of the things you fought for perhaps the most important object." Phillips' view was restated by Albert Browne a youth who had been arrested, questioned, and released in connection with the rescue attempt. He told Higginson that "agitation on the subject is good for the cause. Keep this inequity [Burns' rendition] . . . before the public (and) it cannot fail of producing a good effect. God knows I feel for Burns but I am

sure it is a thousand times better for our cause that he . . . was sent back." In the future Higginson would make excellent use of these "lessons."<sup>53</sup>

By the end of the summer of 1854, the state seemed unable to gather enough evidence to bring most of those arrested in connection with the attack to trial. Only Martin Stowell seemed in any serious trouble. But in November after a number of postponements, new names were added to the list of those to be indicted--including Parker and Phillips. When this occurred the slight strains already existing in the relationship of Higginson and Parker were increased. Parker wanted to make a stout defense but by late fall, almost six months after his own indictment was handed down, Higginson was impatient to conclude the episode. He had been threatened with trial too long and was in no mood to carry the farce any further by arguing the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Law. The main legal fight should be "on the evidence" and Higginson outlined his position to Parker in concise terms slightly tinged with antagonism. He wanted to "go for victory" if he plead not guilty. Yet, "there must be nothing unfair and no compromise in my opinions." He wanted "to combine a successful defense with an honorable one." Higginson jabbed subtly at the colleague who had abandoned him that humid evening in May. The next time they quarreled over broken commitments Higginson would be less delicate.<sup>54</sup>

Parker was dismayed when in April, 1855, charges were dropped against all people indicted in connection with the Burns rescue effort. Parker claimed he "should have liked the occasion for a speech." Never one to lose an opportunity to agitate the antislavery cause, he eventually published an elaborate defense of his role in the affair although avoiding any careful analysis of his speech before the Faneuil Hall crowd.

## V

Regardless of the personal animosities or philosophical tensions that arose over the Burns "kidnapping," W. H. Channing was pleased with the results of the incident. He wrote Higginson about his feelings. According to Channing, events like the Burns arrest would "raise higher the growing desire to break our yoke by awakening the consciousness of the power to do it." Channing was certain the fullness of this sense of "power" could be managed in a "single season." Given the right events and the proper use of those events by abolitionists, men could be awakened from "their drunken dreams of gain and ease." Higginson must have been impressed for Channing also seemed to recognize that the abolition movement could be used to deal with an even "deeper disease" in American society than the institution of slavery: it could be used to discipline the chaos and flux of mid-nineteenth century America. Traditional values could be returned. And

Channing had another idea in case men weren't "awakened" by events like the Burns episode. He advised Higginson that "the next thing to do is guerrilla war at every chance. They shall not sleep whether they pull down their caps or not." News from Kansas must have pleased Channing greatly.<sup>55</sup>

## CHAPTER II

On May 30, 1854, in the midst of the Burns hearings, President Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act into law. News of the signing prompted Theodore Parker to suggest that the Burns episode was merely a diversionary tactic contrived by the Slave Power for the purpose of turning Boston's attention away from efforts to institute slavery north of the Missouri Compromise line. Parker, like so many other anti-slavery men, opposed the Stephen Douglas-sponsored measure from the first day it was introduced in the Senate. He felt it was a fraudulent use of the popular sovereignty issue to expand slavery into the territories.<sup>1</sup>

In the next two years, Kansas and the attendant problems of proslavery Missouri "border ruffianism," inept federal territorial office appointments, and ballot-stuffed election victories, stimulated a new wave of antislavery protest and became the keynote of northern political activity. Harriet Beecher Stowe organized 3,050 New England preachers to sign a petition condemning the Kansas-Nebraska measure. William Lloyd Garrison denounced the act at an Independence Day picnic and then torched copies of the Fugitive Slave Law, Burns decision, and United States Constitution. At least partially aided by reaction to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Know-Nothingism swept into office in Massachusetts. Popular indignation also

assisted antislavery men in their efforts to enact personal liberty laws designed to protect fugitive slaves. Sermons were preached and protest meetings organized in an attempt to stop Kansas from becoming the newest bastion of slavery.<sup>2</sup>

But by March 1855, antislavery men and women began to see it would take more than angry words or political protest to prevent a proslavery takeover in Kansas. They began to see the necessity of subsidizing freestate settlement of the territory. A number of relief committees were set up throughout the North (particularly in Massachusetts) for the purpose of collecting funds and supplies to assist people who were emigrating to the territory. The committees were non-profit models of Eli Thayer's Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society. Their purpose was to provide freestate Kansas emigrants with enough food, clothing, homesteading supplies, and money to insure successful settlement. Antislavery reformers hoped to prevent slavery in Kansas by subsidizing the growth of a population willing to vote the institution down when it came time to prepare a constitution for statehood.<sup>3</sup>

One individual who became quite active with the Middlesex County Kansas Committee in the late fall of 1855 was Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, a recent Harvard graduate, and son of Aaron Sanborn, town clerk of Hampton Falls, New Hampshire. Aaron Sanborn understood the value of proper religious and educational training for his children. He made sure they were thoroughly familiar with the Bible and

received as much public schooling as Hampton Falls had to offer. Because young Frank excelled in his studies, Aaron Sanborn was even persuaded to pay J. G. Hoyt to prepare him for college. Hoyt, a Dartmouth graduate and an "ardent anti-slavery man," began tutoring Frank in 1850 and within a year was sufficiently impressed to suggest further studies at Phillips Exeter Academy where young Sanborn could receive rigorous training in the classics. At Phillips Exeter, Sanborn continued to excel, passed Harvard's stiff classics admission examination and by July, 1852, entered the College as a member of the sophomore class.<sup>4</sup>

During his tutelage by Hoyt, Sanborn was tremendously impressed by the Dartmouth graduate's commitment to antislavery. After a few months at Cambridge where he regularly read the National Era and New York Tribune and frequently attended abolitionist lectures, the young college student proudly proclaimed his own engagement to the movement. He was certain "slavery was wrong" and convinced that "some of the North were governed by a minority small in numbers but powerful in wealth and influence." This minority was composed of "slaveholders and their commercial allies at the North and West." Slavery must be destroyed in order for the "mass of people" to be free from this "dominating aristocracy."<sup>5</sup>

Despite such strong views about the Slave Power, regular attendance at antislavery lectures, and routine abolitionist reading, young Sanborn had relatively little time to devote

to the movement while at college: there were too many other things to do. During his years at Harvard, Sanborn began attending Unitarian services, took long walks out to Concord in hopes of meeting Emerson or Thoreau, and constantly worried about what career he would pursue once he had graduated. In early July, 1853, he and his friend Edwin Morton sat enthralled as Emerson addressed himself to a question of vital importance to each of them. They wondered "whether literature in America could be a young man's occupation and bread winner?" Sanborn also worked very hard at his studies, earned excellent grades, and became editor of the school paper. He even won an election bid to Phi Beta Kappa but declined the offer because he felt the society to be an "unjustifiable intellectual aristocracy."<sup>6</sup>

While at Harvard, Sanborn also became a disciple of Theodore Parker. He first heard Parker when the minister gave his famous Fast-day sermon on April 19, 1852, after Thomas Sims had been returned to slavery. Sanborn was amazed by Parker's political wisdom, religious fervor, and intense abolitionism. Eventually the young scholar was granted permission to exchange Sunday services in the college chapel for Parker's preaching at the Music Hall. As a senior, Sanborn presented a series of lectures on Parker's writings before fellow members of the Hasty Pudding Club.<sup>7</sup>

More than anything else, though, Frank Sanborn's college days were dominated by his relationship with the beautiful



and frail Ariana Walker. He first met Ariana in 1850 while visiting a cousin and was charmed by her grace. After a few more meetings, Sanborn was certain of his love for Ariana. For her part, Ariana liked Frank because he thought "more wholly for himself" than anyone she had ever met, but she wasn't really attracted to the dark-haired young man. She liked him for his "intellectual and spiritual nature" but "not himself," and claimed she was "never interested in one where feeling was so little personal."<sup>8</sup>

Sanborn could hardly be as dispassionate. He hoped to nurture their friendship and win the love of the woman whose feelings were "so little personal." The young man cast their relationship in typically nineteenth century terms. He believed Ariana could be a guiding force in his life; an infallible source of advice and comfort. Surprisingly, there does seem to be some justification for his view. Ariana was two years older than Sanborn, exceptionally intelligent, and possessed an uncanny ability to analyze the people around her. She often amused herself by predicting people's actions. In addition, Ariana does seem to have been quite helpful to Frank during moments of indecision. He repeatedly unburdened himself to her and she calmed him with wise counsel. She always claimed his success was "sure" as long as he bent his "whole energies" to whatever he hoped to achieve. It was Ariana who encouraged Sanborn to attend Harvard and devote his college years to "severe study." When Sanborn wondered

aloud what he could do with his Harvard education it was Ariana who suggested that while he was at college it was the discipline of education he wanted and "not to be fitted for any particular profession."<sup>9</sup>

In time, Ariana began to love the friend she so often counseled, and during the early spring of 1854, as Frank finished his junior year, they announced their engagement. The relationship had grown from one in which Ariana had "no personal feelings" into something much deeper. Frail Ariana Walker became fascinated with the handsome young man who was like a "kind of book in which I like well to read." When she turned to her journal to "review" the "book," a loving, perceptive, and highly revealing character analysis poured forth.<sup>10</sup>

Ariana knew of Frank's weaknesses, knew that he worried about everyone "overrating" him. She knew that the young scholar viewed himself as "quick" but "confused," and totally lacking in "strictness and steadiness." She also understood the paradoxes of his character. Frank valued highly his "independence" and thought of himself as "capable of living alone and . . . apart from all others," yet in his "innermost soul" looked for "some authority upon which to lean" and was "influenced more than he is aware by those whose opinion he reflects." Sanborn was a man of many "noble aspirations, yet unsatisfied." He was constantly "seeking, seeking, grasping in the dark." The young man wanted a "definite end

for which to strive heartily" and he believed that if he had such an end "success would be sure." Ariana had confidence in Frank because he had "much executive power," though she also realized he often "executed better than he planned." Ariana Walker loved Frank Sanborn because he had "great pride," was "gentle" in spite of a certain coldness, and had "strong passions." She loved Frank because he was a man whose nature would not allow him to find rest, a man who regarded "struggle" as a "native element," and who "must work" and "must have a great motive for which to strive."<sup>11</sup>

In the summer of 1854, Ariana Walker became seriously ill. She had battled recurring, short-lived, "nervous attacks" almost every year since 1846 when she first contracted "a painful lameness" which kept her from walking freely. But previously she had always recovered her health. Now, in the humid weeks of June and July, her condition continued to deteriorate and her periods of debilitation lengthened. Shattered and disconsolate, Sanborn turned to Parker for comfort. He told the minister that Ariana had "the marks of . . . a settled consumption" and that "unless some change for the better" took place, she could "not survive another year." He found it difficult to accept that only "a few months" before it seemed he and Ariana "should live together the life to which we have long looked forward." Ariana meant so much to him, was "so woven in my being," that he couldn't "think of life without her." He wondered what

would become of himself in "so great a desolation." He wondered what work he could put his hand to, "what study I could pursue, what pleasure I could feel in anything."<sup>12</sup>

In spite of her illness Frank and Ariana decided to marry. Eight days later, on August 28, 1854, the sickly young woman died. Sanborn was devastated. In the midst of his grief he again turned to Theodore Parker. Sanborn asked that a short note be read in Ariana's memory before the minister's congregation and went on to say that he felt sure "God had some great work" for him to do or "he never would have given me such a wealth of love." In the near future, Sanborn would meet a powerful authoritarian personality who had a "definite end" in mind and a belief that he also had been given a "great work" to do by God.<sup>13</sup>

Sanborn was too emotionally upset to continue his studies during the fall semester. But by December of 1854, he had recovered sufficiently to return to Cambridge and begin the last year of work for his degree. The somber young scholar applied himself diligently throughout the spring and summer of 1855 and completed his courses by late August. He was certain his success that year could be attributed to "less worldly ambition than before . . . and a greater ability to work." After all, it was the "work of two" he was finishing.<sup>14</sup>

The Harvard senior was given an added incentive to complete his studies by Emerson and other Concord residents.

The transcendental sage had been so impressed with Sanborn in previous encounters that he offered the young man a position as schoolteacher in Concord. The idea appealed to Sanborn, so in the early spring of 1855 he and his older sister, Sarah, moved to Concord and began developing an educational program for the coming school year. The young New Hampshire native made acquaintances rapidly and in the process was induced to join the Middlesex County Kansas Committee.<sup>15</sup>

Membership on the committee proved to be an important step in Sanborn's abolitionist career. Within a year he gradually turned away from teaching and began spending more and more time on Kansas aid work. He was soon appointed secretary and put in charge of directing committee affairs. The ambitious young man, looking for a "great work" to do, became an extremely effective organizer. As Ariana suggested, he had "much executive power." Sanborn scheduled lectures, managed fund raising campaigns, and searched desperately for "recent news from Kansas" so he could keep fellow committee members well informed. It was an ideal position for young Sanborn, providing him with a meaningful purpose in life, a new circle of fascinating friends and some influential associations. He was beginning to understand Ariana's advice that he not worry about a career. He was thankful for her suggestion that he concern himself with the "discipline of education." No Harvard course work could ever have prepared

him for the effort in which he was now engaged. It was "discipline" and "organization" that made for successful management of committee business.<sup>16</sup>

The beating of Charles Sumner in late May of 1856, followed in rapid succession by a Missouri "border ruffian" attack on the freestate town of Lawrence, and the killing of five antislavery men on Pottawatomie Creek, increased Sanborn's desire to "do something" for Kansas. The young secretary became so intoxicated with the thought of Kansas as a battleground of freedom that he even debated giving up his organizational activity and going to the territory to fight. "Armed settlers" were desperately needed and Sanborn seriously believed he should be one of them. He would soon disabuse himself of such notions.<sup>17</sup>

In August, 1856, Sanborn was asked to visit the territory for the Middlesex County Kansas Committee and find out whether funds and supplies collected by the committee were arriving at their proper destination. He was also to investigate how the material was being used and what settlers would need in the future. It was the perfect opportunity to test his enthusiasm for "armed settlement." But once out west, Sanborn realized the substantial difference between the organization of settlement and the actuality of living and fighting in Kansas. Like Howe and Parker during the Burns episode, Sanborn began to understand the distance between theory and practice in the abolitionist campaign

against slavery. The young secretary scrupulously avoided entering the strife-torn area and, with a twinge of defensiveness in his words, claimed to his sister that his trip was "only to inspect the emigrant route through Iowa in order that it might be kept open for men, arms, and ammunition." When offered a revolver for protection by Samuel Gridley Howe who was on a similar inspection tour for the newly formed Massachusetts Kansas Committee, Sanborn took the gun reluctantly. He claimed he did "not expect to run any risk." Though he felt strongly he should "go into Kansas" and use the weapon, he realized his own inability to do so and hoped it was "for the best" that he didn't "go in." Sanborn was awed by the romance of "Western Life," awed by the courage and heroism of armed settlers, and he wished that he possessed the leadership qualities of men like James Lane, Charles Robinson and John Brown. But the trip had taught him a lesson: his forte was "executive power" not "armed settlement."<sup>18</sup>

Upon his return to Massachusetts Sanborn spoke of Kansas as the "most practical form in which the struggle for freedom has ever presented itself." It would "justify any exertion." Even if he couldn't bear arms there was much to accomplish in the way of organization. More and more the "struggle for freedom" in Kansas and his urge "to do something" merged. His own "success" and feelings of accomplishment became synomomous with his participation in the Kansas

aid movement. Providing aid for the territory became his "career." By early fall of 1856, Sanborn entrusted his Concord school to Sarah and committed himself to committee work on a full-time basis.<sup>19</sup>

His rationale for this decision was contained in two letters to Theodore Parker. Both provide a revealing glimpse at his motivation and values. Sanborn claimed that he was concerned because the aid movement had suffered from "the want of men . . . devoted wholly to it." The movement depended too much on "transient excitement and activity." Someone must give it "system and perpetual order." Sanborn felt even his "inexperienced labors" were "great" when compared to those of many others who professed interest in the movement. Kansas (and by implication abolitionism) needed men who would make it "their study and business." Until that happened antislavery men had "no right to hope for any good." When Parker mildly objected to Sanborn's decision, the former school master reaffirmed his contention and replied, "I see in almost every person traces of indecision which is fatal to any good settlement of the difficulty. Instead of coming out and facing the real evil we are all . . . held back . . . for some personal reason." Sanborn was "determined . . . to cut through all these meshes and do thoroughly what I have been so long talking about." It was a telling rebuttal from one who knew nothing of Parker's hesitation during the Burns rescue attempt. Frank Sanborn saw himself as an "example," a



person who would convince friends to leave "business and pleasure" and work "wholly for the cause." His efforts would cause men to "attach more importance to the movement." He realized he couldn't expect such a commitment from others unless he was willing to make it "as soon as any." He was "really ready to give up everything."<sup>20</sup>

Such assertions were highly idealistic if not wholly accurate. Certainly Sanborn believed in the moral necessity of ending slavery but he also had personal needs to fulfill that were entirely apart from such a goal. By the fall of 1856, the young man saw that his committee activity could be an important vehicle by which to obtain a "place" in Boston society. Indeed, it was a bit dishonest for him to condemn men for being held back from work for the "cause" because of "personal reasons." He really had no "personal reasons" to hold him back. All his instincts told him that his own self-interest would best be served by joining the movement on a full-time basis. His need to free Kansas and secure a position became the same thing. It was rather easy for Frank Sanborn to advocate leaving "business and pleasure" and working "wholly for the cause." His own self-interest and the freestate triumph in Kansas had been completely harmonized. He didn't need to be altruistic. As he said to Parker at the end of his second letter, it was not a violent step to leave teaching for a few months because there was always a chance his "place" might prove to be "an important one." If his

efforts didn't work out he could always "abandon" them and "take some other place--if I can get it."<sup>21</sup>

The position Sanborn referred to in his letter to Parker was secretary of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee. The job had been offered to him in late September by George Luther Stearns, a Medford businessman who was serving as chairman of the committee. Stearns was overwhelmed with Sanborn's enthusiasm for the aid movement, impressed by the young man's effective fund-raising efforts and eager for his first-hand knowledge of the Kansas situation. Most important, Stearns was tremendously pleased by Sanborn's awareness of the need for "system" and "order" in committee business. Since both men also believed that substantial portions of all funds gathered for Kansas should be used to purchase firearms for settlers, it was agreed that Sanborn should join Stearns, Howe, P. T. Jackson and George Russell as a full-time committee member.<sup>22</sup>

On June 3, 1856 a public meeting of Massachusetts abolitionists voted "to raise funds for the Free State settlers of Kansas." The men selected to lead the state-wide effort were originally called the Faneuil Hall Committee. The committee was chaired by Samuel Gridley Howe (who was available for "any plan to beat down the Slave Power") and it sought to combat the "systematic and extensive conspiracy" against freestaters in Kansas. By June 25, 1856 the group was renamed the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, had acquired a

new chairman, Stearns, and proceeded to raise money with the avowed intention of "going beyond" what had already been done for settlers by way of supplies and funds. The committee membership was convinced that guns were as important in saving Kansas as clothing and farm tools. And Stearns wasted no time in looking to fill this need. In the first four months of his tenure, he gave numerous speeches about the necessity of supplying Kansas settlers, he communicated what the settlers needed and raised 10,000 dollars worth of supplies. Stearns was business-like, organized, and very effective. He never hesitated to use his influence throughout the state. Tinmen, plumbers, and other craftsmen who purchased goods from his lead-pipe factory were employed as a kind of agency by which to raise funds. Between August and December of 1856, Stearns and his "agents" gathered 48,000 dollars worth of equipment for the territory.<sup>23</sup>

Stearns and Sanborn worked well together. The two men shared very similar views and backgrounds. Each came from a family which traced its ancestry back to the first days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Each came from a family with modest economic resources. Each man had to exert great energy to fashion a place for himself in Massachusetts society. This was particularly true of Stearns. George's father, Luther Stearns, graduated from Harvard in 1791 and "quickly obtained a good reputation as an obstetrician." George never got to know his father well because in 1820

Luther Stearns died and left the responsibility of caring for the eleven year old boy, his brother Henry and sister Elizabeth, to Mary Hall Stearns, his wife of twenty-one years. Mary Hall Stearns undertook the task with great strength. She was an inspiring woman who not only saw to the needs of her family but became a "power in the community." The large, broad-shouldered woman walked with a cane, had the disposition of a justice of the peace, and faced the family's financial difficulties with courage. She was a staunch no-nonsense Calvinist who refused to accept "optimistic theories" of religion and probably would have preferred to see her children dead "rather than grown up in idle vicious courses." George saw such discipline as "severe and unreasonable" but his mother saw it as a necessity if she was to hold the family together. She was probably correct. Continual financial problems, sickness, and Elizabeth's death in 1828 strained the family bonds but never broke them.<sup>24</sup>

When George was sixteen his mother sent him to Brattleboro, Vermont, where he trained for a career in business at his uncle's country store. Three and a half years later in 1828, he returned to Boston and spent the next few years working as a ship's chandler, salesman, and bookkeeper. Then, in 1835, Stearns saw an opportunity to start his own business manufacturing linseed oil, an article used extensively in shipbuilding. After borrowing money from relatives, mortgaging the family home (Mary Hall Stearns backed

her son completely), and obtaining a loan of 10,000 dollars from Medford businessman Deacon Train, he invested his funds in the necessary equipment. Because of careful management, Stearns soon prospered. In the first five years of production the company's assets grew substantially and George Luther repaid all the debts incurred when he began the enterprise.<sup>25</sup>

Shortly after repaying the last of his debts and rewarding himself with a vacation at some hot sulphur springs in Virginia, Stearns experienced personal tragedy. His wife of five years, Mary Train Stearns, died of a heart condition. For the next three years the grief-stricken young businessman occupied himself with various community efforts while working almost obsessively to improve his linseed oil business. Then, in the spring of 1843, he met the charming and headstrong Mary Preston, daughter of a Maine circuit court judge and cousin of the prominent abolitionist, Lydia Maria Child. They were married that fall.<sup>26</sup>

Mary Preston Stearns had very set ideas about her family's life style. From the beginning of the marriage friction developed between her and George Luther's mother. Their clashing personalities proved such an emotional drain for Stearns that by 1845, he was building his palatial Medford home on the south side of town in order to "look after his mother without having his wife see too much of her." Mary Preston Stearns was disturbed about more than a mother's

influence over her son. She also disliked the long hours her husband worked. Nor was she completely satisfied with the kind of business George Luther conducted. By 1845, Stearns had pooled capital from his linseed oil business and financed a venture in lead-pipe manufacture. To Mary's mind "the lead-pipe manufacture" was "not a fine sounding profession." She often criticized her husband for refusing to adopt a more "stylish appearance." Socially ambitious, Mary was particularly annoyed at what she considered her husband's failure to "advance his own interests." Stearns seems to have been stung by such criticism. Unlike his wife, he had endured economic hardships as a young man, knew the economic distance he had traveled, and was proud of his efforts. He attempted to blunt his wife's outbursts by defensively suggesting that "considering all things" had had "done very well." People trusted him because he had "no interests of my own to further." But Mary was not to be deterred. She was determined to achieve a name for her family in Massachusetts society or know the reason why not.<sup>27</sup>

Whether because of Mary's incessant promptings to "advance his interests" or because of his own personal desire to continue "doing well," George Luther Stearns began to take a more active role in Massachusetts politics after remarrying. As early as 1840 he had voted for the Liberty Party and it was even rumored that he had been read out of a cousin's will because of his antislavery views. But up until 1848

when he attended the Conscience Whig Convention in Worcester and "gave liberally" to the campaign, he was a political novice. In 1850, he continued these political efforts by promoting Charles Sumner's candidacy for the United States Senate.<sup>28</sup>

Stearns' campaign activity was paralleled by a seemingly compulsive philanthropy. In 1848, he gave large sums of money to Irish famine relief funds and rescued his father-in-law from bankruptcy when he was duped out of his judgeship. About the same time he was working for Sumner, Stearns loaned money for rebuilding the homes of Medford shipbuilders and mechanics which had been destroyed by fire. George Luther and the ever-prodding Mary were also part of a group of prominent Bostonians who hosted Louis Kossuth on his American tour. Stearns purchased a number of Kossuth's ten-dollar "freedom certificates" and raised a considerable sum in subscription for the Hungarian leader's entourage of exiles. Among this group was a young pianist named Zerahelyi. The young man's career had been destroyed by shattered nerves resulting from a six-month jail term he had served for being a member of Kossuth's army. Mary was captivated his "pathetic expression" and her empathy translated into her husband's largesse. Several months after Kossuth left Boston the young ex-pianist was still residing at the Stearns mansion in Medford. At Mary's prompting, George Luther also raised a subscription for Kossuth's sister when she was

deserted by her husband and left to care for three children. In 1858, Stearns gave one of her sons, Casimir, a job in his factory's counting room only to find a short while later that the youth was stealing company funds. Such a discovery was upsetting but of minor significance. For by 1858, Stearns was too busy with another "philanthropic enterprise" which consumed all of his attention. It was a venture he vaguely referred to as "the wool business" and it was being promoted by a failed businessman who captivated Mary Preston Stearns every bit as much as the "pathetic" Zerahelyi.<sup>29</sup>

Ironically, Stearns' intensified social and political activity, facilitated at least partially by his sense of economic security, was followed in 1853 by a personal economic disaster that nearly ruined him. During that year Stearns tried to corner the New England lead market. The attempt was ill-conceived, badly managed, and cost the Medford businessman nearly all his capital. Desperate, Stearns made a last-ditch effort to save himself by borrowing from Peter Butler of Boston and Benjamin Collins of New York. Luckily, both men had confidence in Stearns and were willing to cover his debts. In the next three years, the would-be-lead-pipe-magnate worked strenuously, regained his financial fortunes, and repaid his benefactors.<sup>30</sup>

The trauma of economic misfortune, coupled with two incidents which occurred during his struggle to regain a firm financial footing, intensified Stearns' desire to continue



philanthropic activity and focused that activity in the anti-slavery movement. Shortly after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Stearns purchased a revolver and vowed that "no fugitive would be taken from his premises." But up until 1853, the Medford businessman took no part in the resistance to the law. Then, in the fall of 1853, he was asked to shelter the runaway slave, William Talbot. For six days Talbot was hidden in the basement of Stearns' Medford mansion. When it was safe for the fugitive to leave, Stearns paid for his journey to Montreal. Conversations with Talbot deepened the manufacturer's awareness of the brutality of slavery and began his movement into antislavery reform activity.<sup>31</sup>

The incident that confirmed Stearns' intention to devote himself to the antislavery cause was Charles Sumner's beating by Preston Brooks. The Medford businessman reacted angrily to news of the assault. He was sure it would "make a million abolitionists" and vowed "to do what one man can and devote my life and fortune to the cause." He did not take the vow lightly. In two weeks he had joined the Massachusetts Kansas Committee and by the end of June, 1856, was directing the committee's affairs.<sup>32</sup>

Stearns came to the antislavery movement with some definite theories about the nature and tactics of reform. He fully understood the necessity of carefully cultivating favorable popular opinion. Saddened by Sumner's beating, he

was also well aware that it could "make a million abolitionists" if properly exploited. As a businessman his success had depended upon the ability to market his wares effectively and he correctly assumed the same held true for abolitionism. Stearns was also convinced that the "idea of abolishing slavery in America by moral suasion" was a "delusion." He hoped the institution could be dismantled by political compromise but was willing to experiment with other methods. He never hesitated to use funds raised by the Massachusetts Kansas Committee for purchasing arms when other means of ending slavery seemed destined to fail. Stearns also had a keen sense of the disillusion that often plagued reformers. No reform "could be made with the unanimous consent of the community." Anyone "who stepped forward must be ready to meet the fate of a reformer"--must be ready to be disappointed by the public.<sup>33</sup>

The Medford businessman-turned-antislavery-activist frequently discussed his theories with the man he replaced as chairman of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, Samuel Gridley Howe. The two men first met in 1848 at the Conscience Whig Convention. Later they worked together for Sumner and cooperated with each other in Kossuth's behalf. Stearns was deeply impressed by Howe's intense commitment to Kossuth and his willingness to "cheerfully make any sacrifices" to aid the Hungarian leader. When Charles Sumner asked Howe whether the famous Hungarian exile was demanding

more money than "reasonable," Howe replied he was not at all moved by any suggestion that Kossuth's desire to war for Hungary's freedom would cost too much. If a cause was "right," it could never cost too much. Howe agreed that wars were "bad" but also suggested that "when the lower propensities are so active in a race they must occasionally be beaten down by muskets." Stearns marvelled that Howe was never disturbed by Kossuth's exaggerated claims. The physician contended that Kossuth "like all enthusiasts" overdid his claims and attempted "more than is possible to perform." But Howe felt it was necessary to indulge such exaggeration. Kossuth could "do much" for the cause of freedom and needed "a chance to try a struggle." If collecting funds or enduring overstatement was a way of "keeping" a great man like Kossuth, Howe was all for it.<sup>34</sup>

Howe and Stearns also shared a similar theory of education, one which would have a profound effect on their future antislavery activity. Early in his career, Howe had pushed for the institutionalization of persons suffering from various mental or physical handicaps. As the director of Perkins School for the Blind he worked diligently to establish an institution which would prove the validity of that theory. His reputation in the Boston community owed much to the seeming success of these efforts. By the late 1840's, however, the physician began to have doubts about the effectiveness of

institutional rehabilitation. Experience had "lessened the enthusiasm" he once felt about "such establishments."<sup>35</sup>

Howe now began to believe that the "leading principle" in treating those afflicted with a mental or physical handicap should be "separation and not congregation." He called this his "theory of diffusion." It was based on the assumption that while handicapped people did need special training at places like Perkins School, prolonged exposure to similarly handicapped persons could be detrimental to an individual's growth and improvement. Isolation with similarly disabled peers led to a deteriorating condition. Instead of such practice, Howe now pushed for increased exposure to "normal" persons. The blind, for example, should not stay at Perkins all the time. They should "go among normal persons, adjust to a normal world, and not develop a separate class feeling." Howe favored boarding Perkins students out in the community, using the school only for the purpose of teaching compensatory educational skills. The ideal to strive for was "normal existence among normal people." One should learn by doing as other "normal" people did.<sup>36</sup>

Stearns' work for the Medford Sunday School Association led him to a somewhat similar conclusion. As secretary of the association, he was concerned with the seeming failure of religious instruction: it didn't seem to be making much of an impact on the children. He and other members of the group engaged in long debates over which form of instruction would

best promote true "Christian living" by the youngsters. His own conclusion was that religious instruction depended "too much on teaching theology, Scripture, History, etc." If Medford parents expected their children to learn what they themselves had only "imperfectly mastered," then it was time for Sunday-school teachers to start depending "more on themselves" and less on their "immediate preparation." A teacher could only legitimately enforce the portions of christian truth he had realized in his own life. Only then could he speak from "soul to soul." Stearns was looking for those people who applied the truths of Scripture to "everyday life." The "proper christian teacher" had to be the "proper Christian disciple." The teacher had to be someone who would "enforce precept by example." The Medford businessman wanted to conduct religious education on Sunday as Howe conducted remedial education at Perkins. Stearns wanted to expose children to "normal persons," to "living Christians."<sup>37</sup>

In 1858, both Howe and Stearns would be asked to subsidize the effort of a "living-Christian" who hoped to lead a group of black men and women out of the oppressive and debilitating institution of slavery. This "living-Christian" would premise his own work on the assumption that any "normal" person had a right and duty to strike a violent blow for freedom and that black insurrection was the first step in breaking down "class feeling" and inculcating "normal" values.

Besides sharing similar reform theories, Howe and Stearns seem to have had a genuine affection for each other. It was partially on the basis of their firm friendship that Stearns had been willing to take over the reins of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee when Howe's poor physical and mental health prevented him from conducting the committee's affairs. Howe claimed to be "fairly broken down" in attempting to "pull the laboring oar" of the organization. He was tremendously relieved when Stearns offered to shoulder the burden.<sup>38</sup>

Howe was also beset by other problems that spring. He frequently argued with Julia over family finances and her desire for a literary career. He was shocked by Sumner's beating and deeply disturbed by his good friend's failure to properly respond to medical treatment. And, as always, the tremendous tension of such problems made an impact on his physical health and led him to entertain notions of impending death. More important than all these problems, however, was the fact that in the spring of 1856, Samuel Gridley Howe was undergoing a crisis of character. Doubts, fears, and guilts engulfed him. He wasn't sure of who he was or what he was doing. In a confidential letter to his close friend, Horace Mann, Howe revealed the agony of this crisis. He claimed to be a "mistake; an abortion." The character people attributed to him was "a humbug." His reputation as a philanthropist was undeserved, because he had nothing more than "average

benevolence." The latter years of his life showed "a great selfishness" and "loss of the adventuresome spirit." He longed for a return to his youth when he had been governed by principle and ignorant of "what course would have been profitable." Howe was worried about his manhood, worried about having no more than "ordinary courage." He admitted to Mann that he was even afraid to board trolley cars. He was forever worried about "getting into danger; though able to appear decently cool." The doctor felt there was only one way out of his agony; only one way to recover confidence in himself. He needed one more chance to prove himself, one more chance to recapture the happiness of early life when "health, a good course and clean conscience" were all that mattered. He was looking for an escape to a time when he was "unconscious of any purpose . . . called selfish." He longed for a simpler more certain existence--one that wasn't filled with marital problems, financial concerns, and too many professional responsibilities. The same society that caused the "deeper disease" Higginson so loathed, had placed too many exorbitant demands on Sameul Gridley Howe. He longed for the days of his imaginary past when he didn't care about what he ate or what he wore or "whether anybody knew about me."<sup>39</sup>

As his depression deepened in the summer of 1856, Howe looked to Kansas for a reprieve. He believed a trip there could help him recapture his lost confidence and purpose. Howe hoped to use a Kansas reconnaissance mission for the

committee to re-experience his "adventuresome spirit." First-hand knowledge of the "great ground swell" of "freedom" was just what he needed. After sending Julia and the family to Newport, Howe started west in mid-July. He melodramatically viewed the experience as the "most dangerous" he had undertaken but claimed he felt "bound to go." The "Kansas mission" seemed "a duty, the last of my life that I should ever be called to fulfill." Faced with the problem of alleviating a profound personal crisis, Howe (like Sanborn) proceeded to fuse his quest for relief with the claim of assisting the freestate cause. In the name of seeing himself as something more than a "mistake" and "an abortion," he made Kansas into a fountain of youth, a fountain where he might recapture the "unselfish" ways of the past and shed the concerns of his urban, professional existence. Howe was confused. He grasped for an ordering experience; something that could return a sense of himself to himself. In the end, the trip only served to deepen his guilts and fears.<sup>40</sup>

Incredibly, Howe never did enter Kansas. He never did experience the happiness of a "good course." At Mount Tabor, Iowa, he learned of the critical condition of the freestate forces. Missouri border ruffians had driven into northern Kansas and left only two ways to enter the territory. Howe could go into Kansas with a body of armed settlers, or he could go in alone on horseback. He claimed to have neither time for the first nor energy for the second. But whatever



his reasons, Howe's failure to enter Kansas only added to his romantic view of the territory and those men and women who were settling there. Howe imagined Kansas to be a reenactment of the English Civil War. He saw "southerners" as "all bad" and northerners as "good, God-fearing, temperate, and honest." Like Sanborn, however, Howe resigned himself to organizing the "God-fearing," instead of joining them. He still had a deep-seated fear of personally engaging in physical violence.<sup>41</sup>

The doctor spoke with as many settlers as he could, telling them what their "friends in the East" expected. They should maintain their "constitutional right to bear arms" and never lay those arms down while they had "strength to bear them." But Howe was a bit uncertain about just what settlers should do with the arms they weren't supposed to lay down. When they found themselves "opposed by U.S. troops," the Boston physician suggested they "stand still and insist on a Free State, still bearing arms." It was also important that they preserve their image as law-abiding citizens, and he suggested they "ought not oppose the civil process in the uncertainty and disunion of counsel." If they did resist "the civil process," he was sure "mischief" would arise. Then, whether they were beaten or victorious they would "stand wrong before the country."<sup>42</sup>

Howe was most upset with the actions of one of Kansas' foremost military leaders, James Lane, a lean and sinewy man

of careless dress, and raspy voice. Lane was a combination of "principle and opportunism" who had come to Kansas looking for the "main chance." He had organized a freestate militia and cooperated with Iowans in establishing the Lane Trail through which settlers could move into Kansas and circumvent the Missouri blockade. Howe wasn't impressed by these credentials and felt the man was guilty of "extreme indiscretion" when he visited Mount Tabor. Lane failed to remain "incognito," and, thus, gave federal marshals in the area the idea that the emigrant train leaving Tabor was a filibustering expedition--not a body of legitimate settlers. Howe made Lane's departure from camp a condition for granting committee funds and supplies.<sup>43</sup>

Soon after that departure in early August, Howe began his trip back to Boston. Once home, he found that word of his visit to Kansas had spread quickly. During late August and early September he was deluged with requests for funds by groups heading west. The fact that he had been able to open a channel of communication between the Massachusetts Kansas Committee and freestate settlers consoled him. He was also pleased at having been able to "hamstring the adventuresome Lane." Generally, however, his "mission," his quest to recapture his own "adventuresome spirit" had "not turned out the way proposed." The doctor realized he had given in to his "fear of danger" by not going into Kansas and in the process forfeited any chance to regain the happiness of

dedication to a "good cause." It simply wasn't enough to do organizational work for freestate settlers. He was still ill, still filled with nagging doubts about his own character, still feeling like an "abortion." The trip merely exacerbated Howe's self-recrimination. It again forced him to face the discrepancy between his theorizations about heroic, selfless behavior and the reality of his own practical capabilities. He could advise people to maintain their constitutional right to bear arms but couldn't quite bring himself to pick up a gun. He was lost, confused, and still looking for something "dangerous" to which he could commit himself. Nor had the trip done anything to alleviate the difficulties between himself and Julia. They continued to argue about family finances and her career. Howe's relationship with Sumner was actually strained further by his travel out west. One of the reasons Howe had not journeyed to Washington to visit Sumner after his beating was because of the pending Kansas trip. When he returned to Boston, Howe feebly attempted to defend his behavior and tried to excuse his failure to stay by a friend's side in time of need. He wrote Sumner saying "I now learn my presence might have been pleasant and useful to you. I cannot reproach myself, for when I would have gone I could not and when I could, it did not seem to us here that it was well for you to have any visitors." But Howe did reproach himself. He continued to look for a "good course," continued to look for something beyond his

normal philanthropic interests. In four months, he would find that "course" in the form of a Kossuth-like hero named Brown.<sup>44</sup>

## II

In October, 1855, just before major hostilities had developed between freestate and proslavery forces in Kansas and just seven months after the state of Massachusetts had finally dropped prosecution in the Burns case, Thomas Wentworth Higginson decided to take a vacation. His reform activities, lectures, and Burns activities had exhausted him. The Worcester Free Church also became a burden. The congregation had flourished under his tutelage but as a result demanded much of his time and energy. Another thing that put stress on Higginson was his wife's poor physical condition. Mary Channing Higginson had always been subject to chronic ill-health. Then, in January of 1853 she suffered from an attack of "violent rheumatism." Whether this illness was a severe form of arthritis or even an early symptom of muscular dystrophy is unclear, but throughout that spring she could hardly walk. Though Higginson was upset he did not restrict his reform activities. Indeed, he sought relief by avoiding the issue of his wife's health and spending long periods of time on the lecture circuit. Their relationship became quite strained. Mary needed more and more attention but showed none of the "reverance" for her husband that he admittedly

craved. Added to this was Mary's "undisguised repugnance for children and her husband's solicitousness." Finally, by October of 1855, Higginson, in obvious discomfort about his marital situation and exhausted by the reform work that had helped him escape it, planned a trip to the semi-tropical island of Fayal in the Azores. After requesting David Wasson (a friend of George Luther Stearns) to take over the responsibilities of the Free Church, Higginson and his wife set sail from Boston harbor at the end of the month.<sup>45</sup>

A warm climate and relaxed daily routine refreshed the Massachusetts couple considerably. By the spring of 1856, Higginson became impatient to return to his reform work. Before the Burns episode he claimed to be "just waking up to Kansas - Nebraska" and ready to preach a sermon on it. Now as news trickled into the isolated island about the increased hostilities raging in Kansas, the Worcester activist wanted to do more than preach a sermon.<sup>46</sup>

Immediately upon his return from Fayal in June, Higginson began efforts in Worcester to organize and supply people who wanted to settle Kansas as a free state. These efforts earned him an agency with the Massachusetts Kansas Committee. Then, when a group of forty-seven Worcester men led by Calvin Cutter rejected instructions to enter Kansas by the land route through Iowa and were "summarily disarmed" by a few Missourians, Higginson was asked to investigate the incident. He jumped at the chance and headed west in early

July. After all, Higginson felt he was living in a "great historic period" and he was sure "the future" would "leave no true man unhonored." As he traveled west, Higginson hoped people would begin to understand the "eminent need" to support freestate settlers and indulged himself by exaggerating his own efforts. To that end, he was convinced that if he hadn't begun organizing the aid movement in Massachusetts "nothing would have been done." The Worcester activist still found it necessary to be first among equals.<sup>47</sup>

In September, 1856, he had a second chance to experience first-hand, the conditions in Kansas. He contracted to write a series of articles for the New York Tribune but traveled west fearing his mission would not be a very "manlike one." Unlike Howe, Higginson had "only a sense of general danger" about entering Kansas and wasn't really certain it would be enough of a test of his "manlike virtue." When he reached Chicago, Higginson was further disheartened to find that his itinerary called for him to be "employed more out of Kansas than in Kansas." Higginson felt little consolation in the fact that people he met in the city who had been out west were "very glad" to see him and to know he was promoting the freestate cause.<sup>48</sup>

Like Howe, Higginson was immensely impressed with those men and women who were settling Kansas. Indeed, they were larger than life. They were romantic figures of heroic proportions. Ever since the rendition of Burns, Higginson

claimed that he had been "looking for men." He "found them in Kansas." They proved the "virtue of courage" had "not died out in the Anglo-American race." Like Howe and Stearns who understood and theorized about the influence of environment, Higginson began to realize that all the Anglo-American man needed to prove his manliness was the proper "circumstances." One day in Kansas made the "American Revolution more intelligible." If one could change "circumstances," one could change character--black or white. If men would fight for the right they could recapture character.<sup>49</sup>

Higginson vehemently disagreed with Howe's view of James Lane, probably because the freestate leader went out of his way to patronize the minister. Lane appointed Higginson brigadier general of Kansas freestate forces "because of his past courage and ability," and even arranged for Higginson to join a group of twenty settlers who were traveling to Topeka. The journey wasn't all that Higginson expected. Some danger did exist but the trip proved to be "discouragingly safe." He claimed the group began "to fear marching in without a decent excuse for firing at anything or anybody." He was intrigued with the "wild manly looking riders around him," and a bit disillusioned by the "dirty" life he was leading. "Death" for freedom was "all very fine" but when it came to "dirt for freedom" the sacrifice became "unexpectedly hard." Higginson didn't know how to romanticize dirt.<sup>50</sup>

One of the members of the group Higginson traveled with was James Repath, a frenetic young journalist-adventurer who was also covering the Kansas struggle for Greely's Tribune. Higginson and Repath got along very well. They shared similar views on the moral evil of slavery, the necessity of arming freestate settlers, Lane's staunch defense of freedom, and the right to use violent means to preserve freedom. Repath had been in Kansas a number of months and stimulated Higginson's curiosity about the place with a detailed examination of the politics and leadership of the freestate cause. He seemed to know all about men like Lane, Charles Robinson, and the mysterious John Brown who was quickly becoming a minor legend in the territory. Higginson was also impressed with Repath's exceptional boldness. When both men were arrested and interrogated by John Geary, the newly appointed territorial governor, about the intentions of the settlers they were riding with, Repath refused to be cowed and, instead, lashed out at Geary for attempting to conquer "the Free State cause by arresting Free State leaders." Higginson himself fully believed Geary intended to maintain peace in Kansas "at the price of obedience to a false legislature."<sup>51</sup>

Soon after his arrest and interrogation, Higginson was released and started back to Worcester. He was certain the brief pause in hostilities that settled upon Kansas after Geary's arrival was "only the prelude to a severer struggle."



Both sides made preparations for renewed fighting and neither desired peace. Such a state of affairs further convinced Higginson of the correctness of his theories about the effects of war on men. "War" he claimed "always educates men to itself, disciplines them, teaches them to bear its fatigue, anxiety and danger and actually enjoy them." War made men. Just as his own attack on the Court House had crystalized his own commitment to "practical abolition"; just as it had dispelled his own personal confusion about life goals and the means to achieve them, so too would violent confrontation discipline the men of Kansas. It would strip away their uncertainties about the immorality of slavery. It would cure the "deeper disease" inflicted on men by American society. Righteous violence purified men. It returned them to manliness and Anglo-American virtue. Yes, war made men and men never stopped fighting until they achieved their goals. Since Kansas was not yet free, Higginson knew hostilities must continue.<sup>52</sup>

Upon his return to Worcester the minister confessed that he really enjoyed himself while in the territory. In spite of the near state of seige that existed there (perhaps because of it) Higginson claimed that things and people were "very real there." What was that reality? To Higginson, it was like "waking up some morning and stepping out on the Battle of Bunker Hill." Kansas was the reincarnation of eighteenth century revolutionary America. It was a place of

morality, courage, and freedom-loving simplicity. It was tradition and idealism freed from a "mainchance mentality." It was a place where discipline had replaced the chaotic uncertainty of his own society. Kansas was a place where people were dedicated to fighting for freedom and need not concern themselves with the anxiety of selecting a proper career. The people of Kansas weren't only fighting to prevent the imposition of slavery. They were also rejecting a mentality--a mentality that not only enslaved four million black men and women but also destroyed the "virtue" and "manliness" of revolutionary America.

Kansas was more than a battleground of freedom for Higginson and Howe. It was a refuge, a vacuum apart from their own society, and, at the same time a model for their society. In that imaginary vacuum Higginson fared better than his Kansas committee colleague, Samuel Gridley Howe. While out on the plains of Kansas, Higginson experienced a tremendous sense of uplift. He enjoyed "sitting in a hotel and hearing men talk about me . . . while I know I have incurred the penalty of death for treason under the U.S. Laws and for arming fugitives to Kansas." Yes, these men and women who were settling Kansas were indeed "fugitives." They were men and women seeking release from a "diseased" society. Once home, Higginson despaired of ever having left Kansas and its "fugitives." When he finally discharged his revolvers and put them away in his trunk there occurred "a curious reaction from the feeling

with which I first loaded it. . . . it fully came home to me that all the tonic of life was ended and thence forward if any danger impended the proper thing would be to look meekly about for a policeman, it seems as if all the vigor had suddenly gone out of me and a despicable effeminacy had set in." Kansas illicited a rugged individualist "vigor," while Worcester could only summon "despicable effeminacy."<sup>53</sup>

Higginson soon met a person who symbolized the "vigor" of Kansas. He was one who believed that white America could recapture the values of revolutionary days only when it saw the black man as man, one who embodied all the values Higginson longed to have restored to American society. Ironically, Higginson failed to realize that the values he revered were the same values that drove the expansionism and development of the so-called "diseased" society he despised.

## CHAPTER III

Frank Sanborn prefaced his autobiography with the creed he believed had governed his life's work. He set himself against the "mainchance" psychology of the nineteenth century by claiming never to have yearned for "great wealth" nor sought "leadership or high place in the world." Sanborn maintained that whatever leadership he had acquired owed to "character and not ambition." He was always filled with "contentment in station" though firmly resolved not to be "domineered over by others, either individuals or classes." But Sanborn's activities as secretary of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee belie such assertions; they indicate he vainly sought for recognition among the intellectuals and reformers of Boston society. Indeed, Frank Sanborn was a very ambitious administrator who continually tried to widen the scope of his authority and leadership. Like Stearns, he was displeased with the haphazard organization of Kansas aid efforts and tried to remedy the situation. He changed the committee's voucher system, demanded that many accounts be "explained," asked for careful itemization of all expenses, and constantly prodded agents to fulfill their obligations in these fiscal matters.<sup>1</sup>

During his tenure as secretary of the Middlesex County Committee, Sanborn learned that the amount of responsibility

he acquired rose in direct proportion to the time he put into his committee work: to gain power in the bureaucracy one had to become an indispensable bureaucrat. And, as secretary of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee this was his first rule of operation. Within a few weeks after joining the committee his exertions earned him recognition and respect from fellow committee members. As a result, his opinions were more frequently solicited and receptively considered. This, in turn, lead to Sanborn's increased self-confidence and assertiveness. In late December, he composed an article for the Middlesex Journal and boldly requested the Massachusetts Legislature to appropriate 50,000 to 100,000 dollars for "relief of our brethren" in Kansas. The state should place the sum "in the hands of a committee of good men" who would spend it only with "reliable information" about Kansas needs. A large appropriation would "encourage emigration, promote investment of capital," and prevent a proslavery takeover in the territory.<sup>2</sup>

More than anything else, though, Sanborn's importance to the aid movement and to Massachusetts abolitionism was established by his three year relationship with the gray-haired, steely-eyed, fifty-six year old Kansas freedom fighter who, shortly after New Year's Day in 1857, walked into the committee offices on Bromfield Street in Boston. John Brown calmly introduced himself to Sanborn and then presented the young committeeman with reference letters from New York

philanthropist, Gerrit Smith, Kansas freestate leader, Charles Robinson, and abolitionist politician, Salmon Chase. In measured and controlled tones, Brown told the secretary that he had recently returned from the territory after spending fifteen months fighting for the freestate cause. During that period he and his sons had skirmished with proslavery settlers in the so-called "Wakarussa War," played a major role in defeating Henry Clay Pate and his Missouri border ruffians at the Battle of Black Jack, and fought along side James Lane at Ossawatimie. Brown also remarked that his experiences had confirmed his belief in both the moral evil of slavery and the injunctions of retributive justice found in the Old Testament. Force was the only language proslavery men understood.

Brown came to Boston physically and mentally exhausted. He was out of money and harried by his family's desperate financial state--they were scraping a living out of a small, soil-poor farm in North Elba, New York. He was looking for supplies to continue his freestate efforts and, most important, gently testing Massachusetts abolitionist attitudes on the use of violent means to overthrow the institution of slavery. He told Sanborn that Gerrit Smith believed his chances of getting materials from the Massachusetts Kansas Committee were "middling good." Brown also informed Sanborn that just before coming to Boston he stopped at Springfield, Massachusetts, where he had spoken to George Walker, Ariana's

brother. Walker suggested Brown go straight to Sanborn for any information about obtaining freestate supplies.<sup>3</sup>

As Brown spoke, Sanborn carefully read the letters of introduction and was quite satisfied. Actually the young secretary didn't need testimony about Brown's heroism. He had been reading about the Kansas warrior's exploits for over a year. Abolitionist newspapers were filled with articles heralding the actions of this Bible-quoting freedom fighter. While in Kansas, Sanborn himself listened to the settlers' speculations about the self-sacrificing colonist. Such stories about Brown reaffirmed Sanborn's own notions of the singularly courageous spirit of Kansas emigrants. When he finished reading the letters, Sanborn was immediately struck by the recollection of a note he had recently written to Thomas Wentworth Higginson. In it, Sanborn replied to Higginson's call for the formation of an independent northern militia to assist Kansas freestaters. The committee secretary assured Higginson that Kansas fighting and James Buchanan's election that fall had convinced him of the need to do "something different." Submission to the Slave Power for another four years was "out of the question." Sanborn fully supported the idea of an independent militia. But up until his meeting with Brown, Sanborn was unsure what "something different" was, in spite of his advocacy of that militia. Now, as the intense, imposing, freedom fighter stood in front of him waiting for a response, the young secretary's

instinct told him that John Brown was that "something different" in a manly form.<sup>4</sup>

As soon as the two men began discussing Kansas, Sanborn knew his instincts were correct. Brown was a man who impressed you with his "seriousness of mood." Often emphasizing his ideas with Biblical quotations, one also sensed his unwavering Calvinism. Brown seemed hardened by his experiences in the "wild regions" of Kansas and the young abolitionist admired the qualities of leadership these experiences seemed to illicit. Brown knew what needed to be done to stop slavery in Kansas and he knew how to do it. He was a man used to "directing other men" and not being "guided or trained by them." Sanborn, whose desire for his own family had been tragically disrupted by Ariana's death also perceived Brown's tremendous reverence for family. Brown spoke sorrowfully about his son Frederick's death in Kansas, his other sons' imprisonment, and the hardship Mary had to endure because her men were off fighting for freedom. It was obvious to Sanborn that with such an acute sense of family, Brown thoroughly understood the debilitating effects of slavery. In fact, after listening to Brown during this first discussion, Sanborn claimed he was certain "History" would give the man a "proud place on her pages" and "posterity would pay homage to his heroism." Ironically, in the future, Sanborn made a career out of seeing to it that "history" performed



the task. In later years, promoting Brown's image and legend would also be "something to do."<sup>5</sup>

For the next few days Brown and his young admirer discussed the Kansas struggle. Scrupulously avoiding any mention of his role in the Potawatomie Massacre, the warrior outlined his plans for defense of the freestate cause. He spoke of organizing "every able bodied free-state man" into military companies and gathering the necessary materials to supply these cadres. A cooperative effort could "inspire . . . confidence and courage" in men who would ordinarily be only "dead weight" on the hands of those who possessed "more fortitude and presence of mind." The leaders of these companies had to be men of "impeachable moral character . . . ardent devotion to . . . liberty, gentlemenly . . . demeanor, great practical industry and energy of character." Brown hardly needed to press such views on a young man whose ambition and industry had earned him a place with the Massachusetts Kansas Committee and who believed it was "character" that made for distinguished leadership. Sanborn also heartily agreed with Brown's Higginson-like notions about the beneficial effects that military discipline had on weak men.<sup>6</sup>

Sanborn was overwhelmed by Brown's unselfishness, dedication, and organizational sense. All the man wanted was enough money to arm settlers and "the means for defraying" his "ordinary expenses." The request seemed quite reasonable to one who had advocated a huge legislative grant for Kansas

and its defenders. In addition, the young secretary was impressed with Brown's desire for a regularized payment schedule and a "fair and full account" of all expenditures. Brown's attitudes toward the necessity of proper fiscal organization were precisely in line with what the efficiency-minded secretary had tried to implement as basic committee procedure. Like so many of Brown's past business associates, Sanborn was led to believe that the Kansas warrior understood the value of "system and perpetual order" in any financial aid program. Sanborn wrote to Higginson, explained that Brown needed 30,000 dollars, and asked the Worcester activist to come and meet the man. The secretary also sent notes to Garrison, Howe, Phillips, and other well-known Boston abolitionists suggesting they meet Brown on January 5 at an informal reception to be held in Theodore Parker's home.<sup>7</sup>

For his part, John Brown was equally impressed with Frank Sanborn. Sanborn was not only enthusiastic and organized, but was also in an ideal position to help Brown make vital financial connections. The young committeeman really understood the economic elements involved in resisting Slave Power encroachments. Sanborn also understood that men had to be willing to make antislavery activity their "business and study." While Sanborn had very limited knowledge of what slavery was like, he was angered by the institution's debilitating effects, seemed ready to fight for a state appropriation to assist Kansas, and was more than willing to commit

Kansas Committee funds to Brown's use. Besides, after a lifetime of experiences trying to get men to invest in his own ill-fated economic ventures, Brown quickly recognized young Sanborn's ambition and strong desire to succeed in his work. This intensity, when joined with the young man's obvious inexperience and deferential attitude toward anyone willing to actually fight for freedom, made him more easily manageable than other committee members might be. In the ensuing weeks and months, Brown tried to exploit that manageability. Like Ariana Walker, he realized that in spite of Sanborn's perfunctory protestations about the need for independence, the young man was quite ready to be led. And, as Sanborn himself had suggested, Brown was "used to leading."

John Brown looked forward to the meeting scheduled for Parker's home. While living in Springfield some years earlier, he had often traveled to the Music Hall to hear the fiery abolitionist minister. Though Brown disagreed with Parker's Unitarian theology, he claimed to be "wonderfully taken up" with the minister's "discourse." And Brown's appreciation for Parker's violent rhetorical flourishes against slavery "constantly increased." The difference between Brown's Old Testament Calvinism and Parker's Unitarianism was partially reflected in the controlled but heated debate which erupted between Garrison and the Kansas warrior during the meeting. Garrison's dry rationalistic doctrines, New Testament pacifism, and hopes of ending slavery by moral

suasion were anathema to Brown who based his religious convictions on the Old Testament. Brown literally interpreted the Bible's many injunctions and believed there was a wrathful God in Heaven who took an active part in human affairs through Divine Providence. Some men were even called to be God's instruments on earth and to mete out the severe and sometimes violent punishment of sinners.<sup>8</sup>

Parker listened attentively to this religious debate. Of course he was doctrinally sympathetic with Garrison, yet, his brand of Unitarianism sought to incorporate the emotion Brown conveyed. Throughout his ministry, Parker hoped to demonstrate rational Unitarianism with intuitive and emotional proofs. Intellectually he agreed with Garrison but his sentiment lay with Brown. Religion existed long before the Bible, Christ, or Christianity. The natural laws of religion had existed from creation. They were infinite and self-evident. The Bible merely reflected such laws. Still, Parker knew that to believe in laws one had to know them in more than a cold intellectual way--they also had to be felt. The Emerson-Norton debate of the late 1830's had left this matter clear for him.<sup>9</sup>

But regardless of religious differences or similarities, Parker liked Brown. The warrior believed slavery to be a crime against humanity and understood the necessity of meeting force with force. While Brown was careful not to press

his views on violence, Parker was glad he accepted its necessity.<sup>10</sup>

Parker noticed many of the same qualities in Brown that Sanborn had. Brown was a good family man, seemed to be very careful about his physical appearance, and spoke in measured tones. Undoubtedly, Brown's talk of the value of family inspired the minister. He and Lydia had never been able to have children and both revered those people who understood their worth. Like Sanborn, Parker recognized Brown's discipline and self-control as he presented his case for the formation of military cadres in Kansas.

More than any of these considerations, however, was the kinship of class which Parker felt for Brown. Unlike Brown, Parker had had the advantage of a Harvard education, was financially secure, and had earned an outstanding reputation throughout New England. But the minister still felt an affinity of origins with Brown. Like Brown, Parker was well-born but poor; he was descended from a distinguished ancestry but had no funds to pay his way. As the minister looked at Brown and sensed his bone-weary exhaustion, he knew it was a product of more than the man's sacrifices in Kansas. Parker was reminded of his own exhaustion after hours and hours of reading scholarly tracts and discourses. It was an exhaustion acquired in the name of selfless learning but Parker never forgot that his place in society also depended on such efforts. Brown's exhaustion also seemed to be born of the

struggle for survival in nineteenth century America. Parker was flooded with memories of poor youths who were trampled by the exclusionary class system they encountered while attending Harvard. Like these young men, Brown had to sacrifice "pleasure, comfort . . . eye sight and health" to achieve his goals. Without the proper cultural background these youths were forced to learn "all by . . . soul." They, like Brown, needed "iron" bodies as well as "iron" intellects in order to overcome their backgrounds. They needed stamina or they would "die in that experiment of the Cross." And like these well-born poor boys at Harvard, Brown had "attained a superior culture" at the expense of a crippled body. In a sense, Parker was familiar with Brown before he even entered his home. Both men had struggled with the handicaps of similar origins. One man had "succeeded;" the other had "failed" until entering Kansas one year earlier.<sup>11</sup>

Three days after the meeting at Parker's, Brown met with Sanborn, Stearns and Howe. He had just returned from a visit with wealthy industrialist Amos A. Lawrence who was serving as director of the New England Emigrant Aid Society. When Howe heard this he was prompted to share some remarks he had recently made to Lawrence with the warrior. Howe wanted the Massachusetts Kansas Committee to suspend operations. In its place the doctor suggested the state of Massachusetts should "come out and take the high ground" by making an appropriation for Kansas. The legislature should "break

through . . . the miserable trammels of statecraft" and do "what we would have a brave and generous man do in his own capacity." Such an appropriation would stimulate "fear" in slaveholders. Howe was still ambivalent about the use of force and did not specifically advocate direct attacks on slaveholders but he did believe that if the slaveholders' "fear" could be increased they would be brought to "terror." Kansas must be kept free from the "curse of slavery." Slavery had always "beaten freedom" and it was about time anti-slavery men acted as if "sons of our mothers and children of our wives were among the four million bondmen." Brown completely agreed and could scarcely contain his excitement. If Howe seriously believed what he said about "terror," Brown knew how to induce it. In a year, he would ask Howe's assistance to implement a scheme for "practical abolition."<sup>12</sup>

For all Howe's talk of legislative action, by early 1857, he was deeply disenchanted with politics. No doubt he lectured Brown about his belief that the Republican Party was "falling far short of its high mission." Men solely concerned with the acquisition of political office ran the party. They were "disreputable" and used "disgraceful" methods to get elected. Even Henry Wilson wasn't above trading in politics. He had become the supreme political opportunist, talking with his mouth and "not his eyes." He was "without . . . the heroic element." Howe wondered why men of character were constantly being displaced in party ranks.<sup>13</sup>

Brown fully agreed with Howe's observations. He could cite numerous examples of political ineptitude hindering the freestate cause. The Kansas warrior acknowledged the need for a state appropriation but was not optimistic that it would be approved. As Howe listened to Brown's response and watched him discuss Kansas affairs, he was impressed with the man's "capacity." Indeed, Brown "spoke with his eyes" and possessed "the heroic element." Howe saw Brown as the product of a frontier life that could bury talents, sacrifice taste, and throw away human accomplishment but, at the same time, could illicit by its "courseness and hardness" all that was noble and righteous in the human spirit. Occasionally Brown's version of his role in the Kansas struggle seemed overstated and aroused Howe's skepticism. But in the end, Howe considered such exaggerations as insignificant. After all, as the doctor himself suggested some time before: "Enthusiasts were prone to exaggerate what they had or could accomplish." The important thing to remember was that a great leader could be "used" and therefore should be "kept."<sup>14</sup>

Howe saw a number of reasons why this potential leader of the Kansas freestate cause should be "kept." During the debate over the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, he called upon Sumner to "send a blast through the land." There was a need to "seize an opportunity" while public sentiment wasn't yet formed. Now in the wake of Buchanan's election and continued



Kansas fighting, public sentiment was again ready for shaping. Howe clearly understood there was a need for a "stearn prophet to awaken mankind." And Brown seemed like just such a prophet. With his penchant for quoting the Bible and his erect, puritanical disposition, he might be just the man to "awaken" a slumbering North. Then too, the prospects of Kansas being lost to slavery looked very real to Howe in the first weeks of January 1857 and he was "willing to aid anyone who would fight for freedom."<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the most intimate personal reason for the physician's support of Brown lay in the sad conclusion he brought home from his Kansas trip. Howe realized he was no longer able to actively fight for freedom. The best he could hope to do was to participate in the struggle by organizing and subsidizing someone else's efforts. Soon after the meeting adjourned, Howe wrote to Lawrence asking him to push hard for the state appropriation.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the entire meeting, George Luther Stearns remained silent, carefully watching and listening to the interaction between Sanborn, Howe, and Brown. He saw how impressed his two colleagues were with the man but also knew that as chairman of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee he bore the ultimate responsibility for dispensing funds. It was absolutely necessary that he determine for himself the reliability of the men dealing with the committee. Stearns had to be certain his confidence was not misplaced. Having

been raised by a staunch Calvinist who had rejected "optimistic theories" of religion he was quite familiar with the tenor of Brown's religious convictions. What interested him even more, however, was whether or not Brown understood the demands of careful organization. Could he make a business-like analysis of his material needs? Did he understand that waste and inefficiency jeopardized the whole aid movement?

By the end of the meeting Stearns had his answer. He was sure Brown was thoroughly convinced of the need for proper management, regularized payment schedules, and "full and fair" accounting of funds. Stearns felt Brown could be trusted and suggested the freedom fighter take possession of 200 Sharpe's rifles recently purchased with committee funds and turned over to the National Kansas Committee. On the following day (January 9) Stearns led the committee in voting Brown 500 dollars for "necessary expenses." Brown was also made a committee agent. At the end of this second meeting, Stearns invited Brown to dinner at his Medford home. Two days later on January 11, John Brown rode out to the Stearns mansion.<sup>17</sup>

Stearns hoped the informal dinner would allow him to test the validity of his favorable first impressions, obtain more information about other "prominent Kansas men," and help convince Mary that in his own way he did look out for the interests of his family. Indeed, Mary Stearns was pleased that her husband had invited the celebrated Kansas freedom

fighter to their home. By the end of the evening she sat enthralled as Brown entertained her young sons with a description of the Battle of Black Jack. She was so convinced of the righteousness of Brown's conduct that she proved to be one of the Kansas warrior's closest allies in Boston. For his part, Stearns continued in his favorable assessment of Brown's character. The Medford businessman was particularly impressed by Brown's "very clear ideas in regard to Lane, Robinson and others." Stearns now felt much better about the men who would take possession of funds and supplies sent to Kansas by the committee. Though Brown probably didn't discuss his numerous business ventures with the Stearns, it is unquestionable that the committee chairman sensed his guest's experience in the business world. Only a man who understood the importance of dealing with trustworthy and competent associates could have constructed such an insightful analysis of the personalities directing freestate affairs. John Brown spoke like a true professional.<sup>18</sup>

Quite as important to Stearns, as Brown's analysis of Kansas leaders, was his painful understanding of what Kansas work did to family life. Stearns was particularly sensitive on this point. He spent long hours away from home because of his Kansas efforts and his absence had become a further source of friction with Mary. But here was a man of heroic stature advocating the necessity of family sacrifices for the cause of freedom in Kansas. Brown's theories made a deep

impression on Mary and George Luther. He convinced Mary that she should be more tolerant of the demands on her husband's time. Brown also stimulated Stearns' feeling that his boys were being over-indulged and spoiled. After listening to Brown's rather romantic assessment of how Kansas had strengthened his own sons' manhood, Stearns was convinced that his boys, Frank and Henry, "should be sent away from home for a year or two to prevent them from becoming soft and effeminate."<sup>19</sup>

The most touching moment of Brown's visit came just before he left. Young Henry Stearns boldly stepped up to Brown and offered his savings for Kansas. Brown took the contribution. Then, when Henry asked him to write and tell "what sort of a boy you were," he promised to send a brief autobiographical letter.<sup>20</sup>

Brown left the Stearns home confident the chairman would "hold up his hands" with committee funds. He also believed the wealthy businessman might be willing to personally subsidize his future abolitionist activity. The Stearns visit had been rewarding and in pleasant contrast to the meeting he had with Thomas Wentworth Higginson two days earlier. Higginson arrived in Boston on January 9, just after the committee had voted funds to Brown. Sanborn had requested the appearance, feeling that if Higginson had confidence in Brown he might serve as a conduit to the substantial sums of money reputedly held by the Worcester County Kansas Committee.

Sanborn had good reason to believe Higginson and Brown would take to each other. Only a few months earlier at a West Indian Emancipation Day speech, Higginson had hailed "the glory intrinsic to the white man fighting with arms to end slavery." And Brown was certainly willing to fight. Higginson had also suggested that in a war against slavery "the northern white man's present selfishness and money grubbing would be replaced by disinterestedness and self-devotion." Brown seemed the perfect example of those qualities. To Sanborn, Brown's disposition and personality perfectly reflected Higginson's contention that the "most favored race" found its "highest privilege" in aiding the "weakest," "most ignorant race."<sup>21</sup>

But while Higginson did hold notions which suggested that he would be immediately interested in aiding Brown, a number of conditions unknown to Sanborn prevented the Worcester activist from committing himself to the warrior. In November, 1856, Higginson recommended to Gerrit Smith that an "independent militia" be raised to fight in Kansas. However, Sanborn did not know that Higginson had already rejected a plan to organize such a militia group while touring Kansas. Higginson had not been confident of the group's leadership. And, as the Worcester activist would suggest in the near future, those who knew him best realized that under "apparent rashness, I have a great deal of caution."<sup>22</sup>

There were other reasons for Higginson's coolness toward Brown. While in Kansas, Higginson had spent much time with the roving journalist James Repath. It is quite possible the two men discussed Brown. If Repath even hinted of Brown's role at Pottawatomie, Higginson might have been wary of future "rash acts" by the Kansas warrior. Then too, Sanborn had exaggerated Higginson's access to Worcester County funds. In fact, Higginson was under pressure not to request any more funds until accusations of Calvin Cutter had been cleared up. Cutter blamed the Worcester committee for loosely handling contributions. Hoping to account for funds the committee dispersed, Higginson wrote Martin Stowell in Kansas asking him to itemize expenditures of some 2000 dollars sent from Worcester. When Higginson received an accounting in the late fall of 1856, he found Stowell had lost 100 dollars because he accepted a personal check from John Brown which was eventually returned "uncashed because of a closed account." Higginson wasn't about to make further grants to an individual who regarded his financial obligations so casually.<sup>23</sup>

Higginson was also held back from support of Brown by his deep involvement in the disunion movement. After he left Kansas in the fall of 1856, Higginson seriously believed that if the cause of freedom were crushed there, the United States would separate into "two nations of North and South." The Constitution would not hold them together and the drama of "Union and Disunion" would come closer every day. Higginson

resumed his ministerial duties fully convinced of an "impending crisis." In fact, he wanted to do all in his power to promote it. By late December, there was no doubt in his mind that freemen and slaveholders were living in "two nations."<sup>24</sup>

Early in January he began sending out letters requesting attendance at the Worcester Disunion Convention. In the midst of the effort, Sanborn called him to Boston. The time was inopportune. Higginson had too much of himself invested in the convention. Disunion was the country's "destiny and duty," its "only hope." He would not be distracted. As with the Burns rescue attempt and the Kansas trips, Higginson felt good to know he was in the forefront of a cause. From his early days in divinity school he had always wanted to be a "leader of men." Symbolically, by his disunion efforts, he was again battering down Court House doors. It made him feel "so much younger." Sanborn's request and Brown's presence were as much of an imposition as Parker's and Howe's failure to send the Faneuil Hall crowd scurrying to his aid. He couldn't be bothered with Brown. Unlike his fellow Kansas committeemen, Sanborn, Stearns, and Howe, the minister reserved judgment on Brown. He was unsure of the man's character and was busy organizing the convention. The possibility of help from Worcester could be discussed at another time.<sup>25</sup>

Higginson's attitude stunned Sanborn and disappointed Brown. Still, the lack of commitment was not an outright

refusal and a brief examination of the views Higginson expressed during the convention indicate, at least partially, why it was inevitable that the minister eventually allied himself with Brown.

At the convention, held on January 15-17, Higginson openly clashed with Garrison. He rejected pacifism and political antislavery, he asserted that abolitionists must use "armed force" to thwart slavery and held that "two antagonistic nations could not live together any longer." Higginson was certain disunion must take place. The sooner it did, the better it would be for the North to "prepare for a peaceful and dignified policy." The Worcester abolitionist agreed with Wendell Phillips' contention that "peace between sin and servility" was not a benefit. Even if abolitionists gained control of the United States government it would take "two or three generations" to rectify the abuses of the Slave Power. Political reform was too slow to "effect a cure." Violent, disruptive, disunion was a "lesser evil" than the "gradual dying out of slavery."<sup>26</sup>

In his own speech to convention delegates, Higginson logically extended Phillips' position. He asked the audience why prior disunion efforts had failed, then answered his own question by pointing out that those movements had drawn a "glittering blade" only to tuck it back into a "neat little scabbard" after waving it for popular effect. This time things would be different. Higginson wanted a "convention of



ten men who had drawn the sword for the right and thrown away the scabbard." All they needed was a "chance to come face to face with the United States government" and they could "revolutionize the world."<sup>27</sup>

Ironically, at the conclusion of his speech, Higginson dismissed the importance of the very convention he had helped organize and convene. He also foreshadowed his commitment to Brown. Higginson said it was "vain" to speak of difficulty in promoting disunion. The time would be drawn soon enough by the "passions of men." At best, conventions could only partially prepare the way. By the spring of 1858, Higginson began to believe that John Brown was just the man to arouse such "passions" and it was Higginson more than anyone else who supported Brown and embraced his plan to foment a black insurrection.<sup>28</sup>

Except for Higginson's reticence, the first month of John Brown's presence in New England proved entirely successful. He had acquired 200 Sharpe's rifles, 500 dollars for "necessary expenses," and, above all, solidly established his personal character with those abolitionists in a position to help him in Kansas and with future antislavery efforts. He was viewed as a man of intense religious conviction, high moral character, and great physical self-control; a man who was unafraid of using forceful means to stop slavery. Brown had not attended Harvard but as Parker indicated he seemed to have "attained a superior culture." Most important, Brown's

personal value system was not foreign to Sanborn, Parker, Stearns, Howe, or Higginson. His values were essentially the same as their own. He was neat, courteous, and disciplined. He preached industry, ambition, and calculation at the same time that he spoke of "character" as the ultimate prerequisite of leadership. Brown also had a strong commitment to family. And like all of the men he met, Brown was concerned with "conventional civic repute." As has been suggested, Brown's "ideal person was comfortably within the nineteenth century mainstream." No doubt this gave great solace to the five urban, middle class, professionals who interviewed him.

The one man most profoundly affected by Brown's personality was Franklin Benjamin Sanborn. In particular, Sanborn was moved by Brown's obvious dedication to family. To a young man whose own family life had been cut short because of his wife's premature death, such a dedication illicit deep sympathies. Sanborn also revered anyone who left business and pleasure to "make a study" of Kansas and abolition. When Brown asked the young man to accompany him to New York for a January 24 meeting with the National Kansas Committee, Sanborn quickly accepted. At the meeting, Sanborn requested the committee to relinquish control of the 200 rifles turned over to them by the Massachusetts Kansas Committee. This request was honored but the committee, led by chairman Henry B. Hurd, balked at Brown's desire for "all the guns it had and over 1000 dollars worth of supplies." They also rejected

Sanborn's plea for a pledge of 5000 to 10,000 dollars. Hurd and the others initially felt Brown was "too violent and unpredictable" to be trusted because the Kansas warrior refused to be pinned down by questions about what he intended to do with the arms and supplies. All he would say was that the committee men knew him and his work in Kansas. If they wished to give him anything, he wanted them to "give it freely." Finally, at the urging of its eastern membership, the committee decided in Brown's favor by pledging 5000 dollars to help implement any "defensive measures" he considered necessary to preserve a free Kansas. Brown was also authorized to immediately draw 500 dollars from the committee treasurer as a portion of that sum.<sup>29</sup>

Both men were pleased by the committee's action. Before leaving New York City, they discussed strategies which might force an appropriation out of the Massachusetts legislature. Such a grant coupled with the national committee's pledge would leave Kansas freestaters amply supplied to resist proslavery attacks. Upon returning to Boston, Sanborn wrote Brown and informed him of the schedule for legislative hearings on the appropriation. He advised the freedom fighter that his appearance at the hearings would improve the possibility of passage and force a quicker consideration of the bill. Sanborn realized that Kansas had been relatively peaceful under the strong leadership of Governor John Geary but saw the proslavery legislature's recent attempt (January

12, 1857) to set up a rigged constitutional convention, as an incident that could trigger renewed hostilities. Brown should make it a point to attend the hearings. His traveling expenses would be paid and Sanborn even hoped to "do something more."<sup>30</sup>

## II

After leaving New York City, Brown journeyed to his North Elba home. On the way he stopped off in Peterboro, New York to visit Gerrit Smith. During a previous stopover, Brown had been led to believe that Smith might make a contribution to his Kansas efforts. Brown also hoped the wealthy landowner had some information about the possibility of purchasing additional acreage near the North Elba farm. The new acreage would help relieve some of the financial strain on his family. Brown was elated by his acquisition of guns and money for freestate forces but his elation was tempered by tremendous anxiety about his family's poverty.

Actually the warrior was quite confident that Smith would have money for the Kansas cause. The two men had known each other since 1848 when Brown came to New York to visit a number of black families who had settled 140,000 acres of land donated to them by Smith. The land was scrubbed and almost impossible to cultivate but Smith believed it would help blacks improve their material condition. It was also an attempt to help "colored people give up notions of being

servants and become independent mechanics and farmers." By cultivating their own land, they could avoid relationships with those who hated them. In the end, the land's poor quality doomed the project. Still, Brown was impressed with Smith's desire to do something more than talk about helping black people. Then, in 1849, Smith helped Brown purchase land in the North Elba area and for the next few years the two men maintained a harmonious, if relatively superficial, friendship based primarily on the mutuality of their anti-slavery sentiment. In 1855, Smith invited Brown to a convention of "radical political abolitionists" in Buffalo. At the convention Smith read two letters from John Brown, Jr., which reportedly "drew tears" from many delegates.<sup>31</sup>

But besides hoping that their friendship and similar antislavery views would stimulate a Kansas contribution, Brown had specific information which led him to believe Smith was ready to assist the cause of freedom in the territory. In his conversation with Higginson, Brown learned Smith had given full support to the minister's call for northern state governments to enlist "militia volunteers" for Kansas. Despite Smith's view that government was primarily established to protect property and over-stepped its jurisdiction when going beyond that activity, Brown also knew that Smith supported Vermont's state appropriation to Kansas. Then, too, in his brief meeting with Lawrence, Brown discovered that Smith, in the early spring of 1856, had contributed 250

dollars to the New England Emigrant Aid Society, authorizing Lawrence to use the money as he saw fit. Smith didn't even mind if the contribution was used to purchase arms for free-state settlers, claiming that there were "instances in which the shedding of blood" was "unavoidable." In March of 1856, Smith had also pledged 3000 dollars to Kansas asserting that "we must stand by Kansas resistance." While Brown did not know the extent of Smith's Kansas aid (it is estimated at 16,000 dollars), he was certain his information indicated a willingness on the philanthropist's part to subsidize the violent defense of the territory.<sup>32</sup>

Brown's assumptions were justified. In fact, just before the Pottawatomie Massacre, in early May, 1856, Smith made very strong statements about his commitment to the violent defense of freedom. At that time, he asked an abolitionist convention assembled at New York City to go with him in "voting slavery to death." If the assembled abolitionists weren't ready to vote slavery to death, Smith announced he was personally ready to put "slavery to a violent death." He no longer opposed the "bloody abolition of slavery" and was ready to have it "repulsed by violence" and "pursued even unto death by violence." Two months later, in the heat of Kansas fighting, Smith asserted that where government didn't exist or when it had failed, men had to obey the "necessity of the case," recognize themselves as government, stop "looking to ballots" and start "looking to bayonets." Those who

were truly antislavery men should be "mustering armed men and none but armed men." If "all manhood" had not left antislavery men, they would not leave Kansas settlers to be slaughtered. He was no "bloody-minded man" but felt the South must be "dispossessed" of the idea that northern people were "cowards."<sup>33</sup>

Shortly after arriving at Peterboro, Brown described his successful fund-raising campaign in New England. Smith was pleased to hear so many abolitionists had not lost "all manhood." When Brown discussed his family's difficult economic situation, Smith empathized and said he would see about the possibility of Brown's acquiring additional acreage in the North Elba area. But when Brown finally asked Smith to assist his fund-raising effort he received a sharp rebuff. The philanthropist claimed his previous efforts to "save Kansas to Freedom" had "exhausted his current means." He could not give more money. The refusal jarred Brown but he wisely refrained from pressuring Smith to reconsider his decision. Long years of negotiating various business schemes had taught Brown when a decision was final. Further badgering would only antagonize Smith. It might even jeopardize Brown's plan to request Smith's financial aid for a future assault on slavery. One year from now Brown would return to Peterboro and unveil a scheme (already focusing in his mind) which sought to demonstrate the power of blackmanhood. He would wait until then to press Smith.<sup>34</sup>

If Brown had really understood Smith's personality he probably would have been more prepared for the abrupt refusal. Smith was an individual of "paradoxical intellect" whose fierce denunciation of the Slave Power and emotional outbursts in defense of violence were often inexplicably contradicted by his actions. From the beginning of his participation in the abolitionist movement, Smith never hesitated to advocate the use of force against slavery. At Utica, New York, in 1835, during one of the first abolitionist conventions he attended, Smith responded to mob threats against the meeting by calling himself a "poor peace-man" and demanding the use of "deadly weapons" to protect the right of assembly. Four years later, when he was again disillusioned by the seeming fruitlessness of his abolitionist efforts and again feeling it was "almost hopeless" to spread "correct views," Smith determined that slavery could only be abolished by "force" and never by "peaceable" means. He reasoned that if, as all antislavery men understood, violence was one of the products of slavery, the country would go on with "proslavery wickedness" until the institution had come "to a violent and bloody end." You fought fire with fire. When Higginson attacked the Court House during the Burns rendition, Smith applauded the attempt and was reminded of his own efforts to thwart the Fugitive Slave Law. He belonged to Syracuse's Vigilance Committee, helped establish an underground railroad, and took an active part in the successful rescue of



escaped slave William (Jerry) Henry. When "Jerry" was arrested in early October, 1951, Smith asserted that a judicial release was not good enough. Such an "acquittal" would be as "nothing" when compared to a "bold forcible rescue" which clearly demonstrated the "strength of public opinion."<sup>35</sup>

Yet, in spite of forwarding these views, Smith always stayed within the mainstream of abolitionist reform efforts. Like Sanborn, Parker, and Howe, he had much personal ambivalence about violence. Rhetorical flourish was one thing, actually killing slaveholders was quite another. During the Jerry Rescue for instance, Smith advocated the use of force but was terribly afraid one of the policemen holding Jerry might get hurt in the attempt. He cautioned those participating in the rescue not to do bodily harm to anyone guarding the fugitive. Always an office-seeker, Smith finally won election as an abolitionist candidate in 1852 on a platform that acknowledged "no law for slavery" but also asserted that "national wars" and "the violence" to which misguided and frenzied individuals" were prompted was "unnecessary."<sup>36</sup>

Smith's term in the House of Representatives is also suggestive of his paradoxical behavior. The Peterboro squire voted against a homestead bill because he claimed it confined the "homestead privilege to white people," then he turned around and refused to back Republican efforts to table the Kansas-Nebraska Bill by asserting that tabling was a political tactic which infringed on democratic principle. It was

an odd position for one who had long claimed that the Slave Power controlled the political fortunes of the country.<sup>37</sup>

Actually from the moment of its introduction in December of 1853, Smith opposed the bill. He didn't take part in "un-official efforts" to defeat it or sign petitions circulated by Salmon Chase against it but he did make a speech condemning the measure in early April. Before the full membership of the House, Smith claimed that he hoped slavery would "not end in blood" but "feared that it might." He considered the institution a "conspiracy of the strong against the weak" but he admitted having no plan to end it except "unconditional" and "immediate abolition." Finally, he argued that any institution that reduced a man to a "thing" had committed the "highest crime" against humanity.<sup>38</sup>

When Smith would not join efforts to table the Kansas-Nebraska Bill he rationalized his behavior by claiming that in rescuing a fugitive slave he took his stand "outside government" whereas in his role as a member of Congress he was "bound to the will of the majority." If the will of the majority called for enactment of a measure perpetuating the "highest crime" against humanity, Smith felt bound to obey it. Eventually the measure was put on the floor of the House and Smith voted against it but by that time it was too late.<sup>39</sup>

Smith's behavior was censured by many abolitionists. The New York landowner was particularly upset by resolutions

offered at the National Convention of Colored People meeting in Cincinnati. The convention heartily regretted his refusal "to serve the cause of the oppressed." Such criticism stung Smith. When it was coupled with his hatred for "fixed routine," the feeling his "talents were being wasted," continual subjection to charges of being "out of order" while on the floor of the House, and little "admiration" or "applause" for his efforts, it prompted, in August 1854, his resignation from Congress. The resignation was the final paradoxical gesture of his congressional career because, in one way or another, Gerrit Smith sought political office throughout his entire life.<sup>40</sup>

For over a year after leaving office, Smith retreated from antislavery activity. He even remained aloof from initial efforts to organize and supply freestate settlers in Kansas. And, in the wake of his political rejection, Smith swung back to the position he had espoused intermittently for twenty years. Smith now claimed to entertain "slight hope" that American slavery would come to a peaceful conclusion. There wasn't enough "virtue" left in the American people. Law, education, politics, and religion conspired to blind men on the subject of slavery. Traditional institutions and traditional methods would no longer work. Slavery had to die a "bloody death."<sup>41</sup>

By late spring of 1856, Smith's wounded sensibilities had begun to heal. He cautiously returned to the traditional

arenas of antislavery activity. Though not entirely giving up his thoughts that slavery must be violently overthrown, he nevertheless reversed his assessment of the American people. He now felt they were "entirely ready" to destroy slavery. All they needed were "leaders" to direct them on the work of destruction." It was a pity that "cowardly statesmen" would not forget their caution and "bid the masses to march--not with bayonets but with ballots."<sup>42</sup>

In Smith's refusal to give money for Kansas, Brown caught a glimpse of his rapidly shifting and sometimes outrageously paradoxical behavior. Perhaps after their meeting ended Brown instinctly understood that personal slights and disturbing emotional experiences often had a profound impact on the wealthy landowner's ideological posture. In any case, Brown left Peterboro satisfied that Smith would try to find land for his family and optimistic that Smith could be counted on for a contribution at some later time.

### III

After spending a few days in North Elba, Brown again traveled to Boston for his February 18 appearance before the Massachusetts legislature's Committee on Federal Relations. The committee was charged with investigating the idea of a state appropriation for Kansas. Sanborn had suggested Brown's appearance before the group and worked hard prodding its members to quickly consider the appropriation proposal.

His efforts were more than rewarded by the speech Brown gave. While poorly structured, haltingly delivered, and, at times, a simplistic assessment of the Kansas situation, the brief address revealed Brown's uncanny ability to make a calculated emotional appeal. He was a failed businessmen who spoke with a monotonous cadence but he had not forgotten the essentials of salesmanship. He knew what symbols resonated the empathy of his listeners. Brown stood before the committee and discussed the great sacrifices of time and energy made by himself and other freestate settlers in defense of Kansas. He spoke of farmers' lost crops, settlers terrified by continual violence, and the tremendous loss of life and money in the territory. In a dramatic gesture, he held up the trace chains which proslavery men had used to imprison his sons and then lashed out at the "barbarous treatment" they had received. Near the end of the speech he lamented his son Frederick's death. It was an impressive performance filled with uplift maxims, Biblical allusions, and the unstated but implied contention that though John Brown had sacrificed much he was willing to do more if supplied with the necessary funds.<sup>43</sup>

When Amos A. Lawrence heard about Brown's speech he immediately contributed 70 dollars for Brown's "personal use." Lawrence also confided that although he had "no definite knowledge" on which to base his suspicions, he felt sure Brown would be disappointed if he relied too heavily on the

pledges of the National Kansas Committee. The committee had "not inspired confidence." It would be difficult for them to raise funds. Lawrence's words were not taken lightly by the canny Brown. Many times in the past his own business ventures had been ruined by poor management and lost confidence. He and his oldest son, John Jr., often discussed the best way to preserve trust among financial confederates. Brown thanked Lawrence for his "kind hints" and suggested they were an "exact expression" of his own "private conjunctures." Brown had come to Boston with a lifetime of experiences at requesting funds for one enterprise or another. This letter to Lawrence, his performance before the Massachusetts legislature, and, in fact, the whole tenor of his efforts with Massachusetts Kansas Committee members suggests that he applied the lessons of these experiences to the task of funding his Kansas work. He was quite adept at calculating the effect of his own actions and could quickly evaluate, as well as, deftly manipulate the personalities of the men and women around him.<sup>44</sup>

Clearly, the man most influenced by Brown was Franklin Sanborn. After attending the legislative hearing and listening to the Kansas warrior's speech the secretary was a bit overwhelmed. He was so caught up with Brown that he claimed to be certain "we shall get a bill"--even though a more careful assessment of the legislature's attitude would have suggested otherwise. Sanborn's use of the word "we" in his note

is highly suggestive. It had been almost three months since he began work as a full-time committee member. At first, despite protestations to the contrary, he had been plagued with serious doubts about the wisdom of his decision. He made vigorous efforts to overcome the anxiety, prove his worth, and expand his authority. But since Brown had come to Boston those doubts had disappeared. His belief in Brown and the correctness of his decision developed symbiotically--each nourishing the other until Brown himself had become a kind of living symbol of Sanborn's secure sense of place in the movement. Brown was not only a person to commit himself to but also a kind of prototype for all the personal qualities Sanborn imagined to be prerequisite for success. Brown was someone to be studied as well as followed. The young man who spoke of the need for independence yet "looked for authority" had finally found "something to do." Brown served Sanborn's need for cause, career, and identity.<sup>45</sup>

Brown was less certain about the state appropriation than Sanborn. This uncertainty and the "hints" in Lawrence's letter prompted him to begin looking for funds in other places. For the next three weeks he rode rattling trains all over New England in that quest. These weeks were difficult ones for Brown. People were interested in his tales of Kansas life but had little cash to spare. Kansas remained quiet, Geary seemed in full control of the territory, and people were just beginning to feel the pinch of financial

panic that would sweep the country that year. At the same time that funds for his Kansas work dried up, the reality of his family's desperate financial condition pressed in upon him. The condition also affected his sons. They didn't want to "learn and practice war" anymore. Despite Brown's reminder that it was they not he who had engaged in fighting "in the first place" and that he had no "love for the business," they all seemed ready to leave Kansas and return home. Some pressure was lifted off Brown when, in the first week of March, Samuel Thompson (one of the men who owned the North Elba land Brown was negotiating for) loaned a small sum of money to the family.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of a growing sense of desperation, Brown occasionally felt moments of accomplishment. He sent newspaper clippings to his wife Mary showing the "different stories" being told about him but cautioned her that "none of them tell things as I tell them." Brown believed he could make people realize their "duty" even though they stubbornly clung to the delusion that they had a "right to give or not to give." Hoping to promote this conception of people's "duty," he published a broadside in early March which appealed to the "friends of Freedom." In it, he asked people to "hold up his hands" with contributions and suggested that it was with "no little personal sacrifice" that he came before the public "in this manner." He felt that the appeal, when taken together with Buchanan's election, Taney's Dred Scot decision,



and Buchanan's seeming foreknowledge of it, would clearly underline the price of freedom in Kansas.<sup>47</sup>

At this critical moment in his search for money Brown welcomed an invitation from Sanborn to speak at Concord before an audience certain to be receptive and generous. Sanborn hoped it would prove how much "he regretted" that "so little" had been done for Brown and how much he understood what it was like to "suffer from the false confidence of the public." Besides, Sanborn was sure "the ladies would be glad" if Brown would speak.<sup>48</sup>

On the afternoon of March 11 Frank Sanborn paced nervously on Concord's train station platform awaiting Brown's arrival. When Brown did appear, the two men greeted each other warmly and went directly to Ellery Channing's place. That evening Brown had dinner at Thoreau's home and afterward narrated his role in the Battle of Black Jack where he had relieved Henry Clay Pate of his magnificently mounted Bowie knife. The second night of his visit Brown was invited to Emerson's home. When the meal was finished the party adjourned to the Town Hall where Brown addressed an assemblage of about 100 people. During his speech the freedom fighter again exhibited the chains that bound his sons in Kansas and spoke of Missouri proslavery "ruffians" as having the "perfect right to be hung." For those who listened carefully to Brown during the speech and throughout his visit in Concord some hint of his wish to confront slavery in places

other than Kansas would have revealed itself. Emerson, in particular, should have been forewarned. Earlier that evening Brown remarked that "it was better that a whole generation of men, women and children pass away by violent death" than to have a word of either the Bible or Declaration of Independence violated.<sup>49</sup>

Concord residents missed Brown's hints. But they did not miss the personal qualities which convinced certain abolitionists he should be given a chance to confront slavery in a place other than Kansas. Those qualities were eloquently described by Thoreau when, some years later, he composed his "Plea for Captain John Brown." What impressed Thoreau was Brown's rare gift of "common sense." He was a "man of action, ideas and principles" yet one who did not yield to "whim or transient impulse." Brown's essence was reflected in his speech: he always spoke "within bounds." Thoreau remembered how Brown referred to his family's sufferings "without ever giving the least vent to his pent-up fire." Brown was a "volcano with an ordinary chimney flue." He was an "experienced soldier" who "kept a reserve of force and meaning." Listening to Brown was like listening to Cromwell. His puritan virtue and Old Testament enthusiasm moved Concord and Boston audiences alike. But it was his fantastic control, his unswerving discipline, which inspired their confidence in his capabilities. Discipline and control, these were the virtues revered by many reformers in

mid-nineteenth century America. Properly applied, they could help abate the social chaos stimulated by industrialization and emigration. Properly applied, they could help resolve economic uncertainty, dismantle the institution of slavery, and win freedom for settlers on the plains of Kansas. Properly applied, they could bring the return of traditional American values. Higginson claimed his trip to Kansas was like revisiting the Battle of Bunker Hill. Those Concord men and women who listened to Brown speak that evening felt the same way. But Brown was more than a religious prophet, more than a reincarnation of America's revolutionary spirit, he was also a model of virtue for a newly developing urban middle class.<sup>50</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

In spite of the enthusiasm and sympathy which Concord residents expressed for Brown and the cause of freedom, they donated very little money. The Kansas warrior left town tremendously dispirited and determined to change his tactics of request. Up until the Concord address, Brown had traveled widely throughout New England speaking with large numbers of antislavery men and requesting them to "help fill his hands" for freedom. He based the plea on the virtue of his own character, his willingness to fight for freedom, and his first-hand knowledge of the Kansas situation. These efforts earned him only a modicum of success. He was given guns and money by the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, a tentative commitment of funds from the National Kansas Committee, and a number of small donations from Connecticut citizens. But from mid-February to mid-March Brown had not added substantially to these contributions. In fact, he heard rumors that Massachusetts would not make a state appropriation and the National Kansas Committee was going to renege on its January agreement. When these fund-raising failures were linked to his family's deteriorating economic situation and his sons' growing reluctance to fight unless something could be done for the family, Brown felt compelled to change his methods.

In the weeks following his Concord address Brown pursued funds more aggressively. He showed less of the calm demeanor that made men wonder at his discipline and became more demanding. He accentuated the self-sacrifice of his own and his family's efforts. He applauded the New England abolitionist community less and chastised them more for failing in their moral obligation to assist the Kansas freestate movement. Most important, the Kansas warrior focused his appeal. He spent fewer hours traveling all over New England and more time applying pressure on the three people most receptive to him, Frank Sanborn, George and Mary Stearns.

Immediately after his Concord appearance, Brown went to the Stearns mansion in Medford and outlined the poor response to his efforts. Stearns and Brown discussed the possibility that the National Kansas Committee would try to back out of its agreement. They both felt that chances for a state appropriation were slim. Brown mentioned that the only people who had shown any concern were the citizens of Collinsville, Connecticut, who contributed 80 dollars and promised to ship his grandfather's gravestone to North Elba where it could be "faced and inscribed" in the memory of "Our Poor Fred" who "sleeps" in Kansas. For the first time, Brown also spoke at length about his family's desperate economic condition and the need to purchase more land around the North Elba farm site in order to relieve that condition. While Brown admitted his needs more openly and discussed his

efforts in greater detail it seems unlikely that he told the lead-pipe manufacturer everything. He certainly did not reveal his contract with the blacksmith Charles Blair. While in Collinsville, Brown met Blair and agreed to buy 1000 steel pikes for a dollar a piece. As part of the deal, Blair also agreed to apprentice Brown's son Jason for one year providing the young man with training, room, board, and 200 dollars for his services.<sup>1</sup>

Stearns was sympathetic and understanding but not very helpful. He could make no personal commitment of funds because of his own pressing financial obligations. And he told Brown that the Massachusetts Kansas Committee didn't have any more cash to spare. Stearns does seem to have suggested that Brown write to Amos A. Lawrence about starting a subscription for the North Elba land purchase. After all, Lawrence had already contributed 70 dollars for Brown's "personal use" and Stearns believed it was quite probable he would be willing to do more.<sup>2</sup>

Brown was encouraged by Stearns' suggestion. A few days later while soliciting funds at a March 19 meeting in New Haven, he took Stearns' advice and sent a short note to Lawrence. He asked the industrialist to assist some New Haven friends who had pledged to raise 1000 dollars to help purchase additional tracts of land around his North Elba farm. Lawrence balked at the request claiming he had just spent over 14,000 dollars to aid the construction of public

schools in Kansas and did not want to involve himself in yet another fund drive. He would think about "heading" such a subscription but couldn't possibly do anything else.

Lawrence assured Brown that if something happened to him while he was engaged in the "great and glad cause" of freedom, he could assume that his wife and children would be cared for "more liberally than you now propose." Such guarantees were good to hear but weren't negotiable. Brown still needed funds. He refused to give up on the demand that a subscription be raised and in the next few weeks put intense pressure on Stearns and Lawrence to help him purchase the acreage. For the moment, he hoped to appease his family by sending them 150 dollars from funds he had already received.<sup>3</sup>

By the last week in March Brown was exhausted from traveling, discouraged by the continued fruitlessness of his efforts, and irritated by Sanborn's recent note hinting that the legislative appropriation would not pass. Summoning what little energy he had left, the Kansas warrior asked the young committee secretary to accompany him to Easton, Pennsylvania for discussions with ex-Kansas governor Andrew Reeder. Brown hoped to persuade Reeder to return to Kansas as an agent for the National Kansas Committee and leader of freestate forces. Charles Robinson, who along with James Lane initially organized the freestate militia, had lost the confidence of many antislavery men in the East because of timid and conservative policies. Brown was certain that this loss of faith had

affected his own fund-raising efforts. With Reeder in a position of leadership perhaps some of that faith could be restored and his own efforts enhanced.<sup>4</sup>

Sanborn was just preparing for a trip to Washington, D.C., when he received Brown's invitation. He immediately wrote and told Brown that he would be happy to assist and would meet the Kansas warrior at Easton upon his return from the nation's capital early in the first week of April.<sup>5</sup>

Upon arriving at Easton, Sanborn received a summary of Brown's reasons for trying to persuade Reeder to return to Kansas. Then, both he and Brown entered into discussions with the ex-governor. They urged Reeder to take the committee agency claiming that a man of his "great ability . . . foresight, boldness and prudence" would be an immeasurable aid to the cause of freedom. Reeder was flattered and thanked his guests for their expressions of confidence but he refused, saying simply that he did not want to return to the territory. Both Sanborn and Brown were disappointed by Reeder's reply and asked him to reconsider. When he stood firmly by his decision the two men thanked him for the courtesy of hearing them out and started back to Boston.<sup>6</sup>

There is little doubt that Brown was sincere in his request for Reeder's help. But the Kansas warrior was as interested in isolating Sanborn for a few days in order to thoroughly discuss his own financial difficulties, as he was in obtaining the ex-governor's assistance. Brown used their



trip back to Boston to gently pressure Sanborn into exerting his influence to obtain more funds for the Kansas campaign. In very emotional terms, he discussed the sacrifices of his family with the overly sympathetic young man. Brown even admitted that his sons wanted to leave Kansas because of the privation their absence caused the rest of the family. The Kansas warrior claimed he wanted to make the "best provision" he could for his wife and children. Brown also spoke of his own disillusionment and uncertainty, his belief that Buchanan was a tool of the Slave Power, and his conviction that Robert Walker's recent appointment as governor of the territory would jeopardize freestate exertions. Hoping to persuade Sanborn how much his trust and help was needed, it is quite possible Brown revealed his belief that even if freestaters gained control of Kansas slavery would continue in the United States until the day black men and women rose up and violently destroyed it.<sup>7</sup>

Sanborn was moved by Brown's expressions of confidence. And though he was unsure about the necessity of black insurrection, he completely agreed with the warrior's contention that there was no possible political solution for slavery in either Kansas or the United States. His recent experience in Washington, D.C., fully convinced him of that proposition. While in the nation's capital he was terribly upset by what seemed to be a very cumbersome process of government and he was thoroughly dismayed by "what sort of men rule us." The

city was an incredibly "odd place," inhabited by a group of men whose character was a "matter for tears." As far as Sanborn was concerned, of all the "creepy things" an "office seeker" was the "most loathesome." How could such men be expected to legislate slavery out of existence? They didn't have enough character. Washington itself was an "absurd sanctuary" of that very institution; it was the home of the Slave Power and "full of abomination."<sup>8</sup>

Sanborn was also confused and at a loss about what he personally could do to alleviate Brown's financial headaches. He had used as much influence as he had to get Brown Massachusetts Kansas Committee funds and weapons. He had pushed the Massachusetts legislature to act quickly on the Kansas appropriation bill, set up Brown's meeting with the legislature's Committee on Federal Relations, journeyed to New York with Brown to appeal for National Kansas Committee help, and hurried to Easton for consultations with Reeder. Now Brown was pressuring him to do more and even vaguely hinting about a plan to start a black insurrection. It was all very disconcerting for the young secretary who, until the trip to Easton, had not fully realized the demands Brown hoped to make on him and other committee members. Sanborn could only suggest they check on the progress of the Massachusetts appropriation.

When the two men finally arrived in Boston they were confronted with more bad news. The National Kansas Committee

had decided to cancel its pledge to Brown because of the state of "public opinion." Lawrence had guessed correctly. The committee lacked the confidence of the northern anti-slavery community and this, added to the relatively stable condition in Kansas that spring, made it impossible to collect the cash necessary to meet their commitments. Along with the notification of cancellation, Brown also found a 50 dollar contribution from Eli Thayer and 20 dollars from Thomas Wentworth Higginson. The contribution from Higginson particularly irritated both men. They felt the 20 dollars was a mere pittance compared to what might have been sent if Higginson had made a serious effort to persuade the Worcester County Committee of Brown's real needs. Restraining his anger (as he had throughout the last week of February and all of March) Brown wrote a thank you note to Higginson. He told the minister of his anxiety to secure a "mere outfit," and claimed he was being prevented from going to Kansas "at once" by a lack of funds. But even more upsetting than the National Kansas Committee's cancellation and Higginson's token contribution was a letter waiting for Brown from his son Jason which informed him that federal marshals had been making inquiries about him in Cleveland. In the midst of efforts to collect funds, Brown was forced to abandon even these unsuccessful attempts by the threat of arrest. Luckily, Samuel Gridley Howe and other committee members were able to prevail on the antislavery judge, Thomas Russell, to

hide Brown in his home. For the next week, Brown took refuge in a third floor bedroom at Russell's place brooding about his failure to collect substantial sums and calculating how to stir New England antislavery men out of their lethargy.<sup>9</sup>

A few days after Brown began his seclusion, he started work on an essay called Old Brown's Farewell . . . To Plymouth Rock which he hoped Theodore Parker would read before his congregation. In it, Brown discussed his personal privations in seeking to assist Kansas freestate settlers and asserted that "every citizen" was under "equal obligation" to do all that he had done for freedom. Neglect of such duties would not be forgotten. All men would be held "accountable to God." Brown complained that even though he had asked "no wages" he couldn't secure "the necessary supplies of a common soldier." As far as he was concerned, New Englanders had spurned their ancestors and their traditional support of liberty: "How were the mighty fallen!"<sup>10</sup>

The essay was similar to his broadside issued in early March and Brown was hopeful of a positive reaction. But before asking Parker to read the piece, Brown used the essay (as he had the Easton trip) as a subterfuge. Claiming he was unsure of the essay's reception, he asked Mary Stearns to read it and offer her critical judgment. The request was not a random gesture but a carefully calculated move to convince Mary of the legitimacy of his financial needs. On at least one occasion (probably many others) Brown and his son John

Jr. discussed the role of a woman in a business transaction. It was John Jr.'s opinion that when a woman "got an idea into her head" it was "very hard to get out." If properly impressed, a "talking woman" could "exert some influence in such a transaction." Brown could hardly have missed Mary Stearns' enraptured glances two months before as he sat talking to her boys of his role at Black Jack. Nor could he have missed the influence she exerted upon George Luther. Now he desperately needed funds from her husband and used her evaluation of the Farewell as a pretext for enlisting her husband's personal financial resources. Just a short time after Mary Stearns left the Russell home, George Luther returned there, strode up three flights of stairs to Brown's room, and proceeded to authorize the Kansas warrior to draw on him for up to 7000 dollars should the need arise when Brown returned to Kansas. Brown's judgment about Mary Stearns had been correct.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the 7000 dollar authorization, Stearns called a meeting of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee to explore for other sources of funds. On April 9 the committee met and decided to allow Brown to sell 100 of the 200 Sharpe's rifles he had been given in January at 15 dollars a piece to "reliable" freestate settlers. The moving force behind this authorization seems to have been Stearns who had originally purchased the rifles with personal funds. Six days later, on April 15, Stearns notified Brown that the

committee had voted him a "further sum" of 500 dollars. The Kansas warrior was so elated that he was hardly disturbed by Stearns added stipulations to the April 9 grant. Stearns requested that the "proceeds" from the gun sales should be used for the "benefit of Free State men in Kansas," and that Brown keep an account of the sales "as far as practical." This rather perfunctory injunction from the business-minded Stearns only served to buoy Brown's enthusiasm and reaffirm his faith in Mary Stearns' influence over her husband.<sup>12</sup>

John Brown immediately notified his son John Jr. of the windfall. And it is fitting that the younger Brown shared in his father's joy. More than any other person John Brown Jr., had provided his father with guidelines for the successful conduct of business transactions. It was the younger Brown who stressed the importance of projecting a keen organizational sense, advised his father about the use of influential women in a transaction, and counseled his father to always keep his business partners apprised of his comings and goings. In his letter to John Jr., the Kansas warrior also spoke of acquiring his grandfather's gravestone and hinted at future plans which the younger Brown already knew about. Brown suggested that the stone had "sufficient size" to contain more "brief inscriptions" and asserted that in one hundred years the stone would be a "great curiosity." Brown closed the letter by thanking his son for his past advice "about the value and importance of discipline." The advice had been

correct and was "fully" appreciated. Brown had managed to control his anger during the weeks when contributions had been poor and he was rewarded for this control with substantial aid for Kansas. He also gained the full confidence of two men and one woman in a position to assist his future insurrectionary plans. Indeed, John Jr. should be heartily thanked for his remarks about the "importance of discipline."<sup>13</sup>

## II

It is ironic and typical that after exerting such masterful control over his emotions during his weeks in the East, Brown's elation over acquiring funds stimulated an over-aggressiveness that nearly destroyed his relationship with the two men who had done most to insure his success. Because of an exaggerated belief in his ability to manipulate Sanborn and Stearns, Brown tried to force them into filling a 1000 dollar subscription for purchase of North Elba property. And he did this in the face of their less-than-firm commitment to raise the sum. Brown hoped to pressure both men into alleviating his family's financial difficulties as they had his Kansas needs.

Admittedly, there was some reason for Brown's overly optimistic assumptions about his ability to move Sanborn and Stearns. Just before he left Boston in mid-April, Brown received a letter from Sanborn which more than justified his

conclusion that the young secretary would continue to be as easily manipulated in the future as he had been in the past. Sanborn thanked Brown for "remembering me as you have done and claimed he would "prize" anything from the warrior as a "memento of the bravest and most earnest man it has been my fortune to meet." The ex-schoolteacher hoped Brown would never regard himself as an "unprofitable servant." His Boston friends took great interest in his "future career." If anything happened to him in Kansas, Sanborn claimed he would see to it that Brown's family was made "more comfortable" and his "memory defended." Sanborn concluded his letter by suggesting that if he could serve Brown in any way he would "reckon it an honor to do so." Brown had also spoken of his family's difficult situation with Mary Stearns when she came to evaluate the Farewell and he felt she could be counted upon to press her husband's efforts on their behalf. Then, too, Brown had discussed the possibility of a subscription with Stearns throughout the spring. It was Stearns who first suggested Brown seek Lawrence's help in raising the sum. Before Brown left Boston he and Stearns had also talked about the possibility of the Medford manufacturer's purchase of some 200 revolvers for the Kansas effort. At the time, Stearns didn't seem pressed for funds and Brown assumed he was both willing and financially able to take on the burden of filling out the land subscription. Brown did not anticipate (perhaps refused to anticipate) the possibility that the



primary task of collecting money for the land purchase would stretch Stearns' generosity to the limit.<sup>14</sup>

After remaining in North Elba for two weeks Brown began his concerted effort to pry funds loose from his Boston friends for the purchase. On April 29 he wrote to Derrick Foster, a Boston State House clerk, asking him to inquire about the subscription. Foster talked to Stearns then wrote back to Brown. In his letter, Foster told Brown that Stearns said the aid for Brown's family (which had only been "partly promised") would be made up with as "little delay as possible."<sup>15</sup>

Foster's inquiry taken in conjunction with a letter Brown had sent a few days earlier greatly angered George Luther Stearns. Stearns disliked the tone of both. Brown was hoping to make a deal with T. W. Carter of the Massachusetts Arms Company for 200 revolvers and had written Stearns to tell him Carter was willing to sell the guns for 1300 dollars as long as the sale was "not made public." Near the end of the letter Brown tersely suggested that "if Rev. T. Parker and other good people at Boston would make up that amount I might at least be well armed." The insinuation was obvious to Stearns: the subscription had been slow in coming and Brown was angry.<sup>16</sup>

Brown had been granted over a 1000 dollars by the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, placed in charge of 200 Sharpe's rifles, 100 of which he could sell, and he had been

authorized to draw on Stearns for up to 7000 dollars once in Kansas. Now he was pressuring Stearns for an additional 1300 dollars for revolvers and 1000 dollars for a land purchase. The volatile Stearns became enraged. He saw Brown as nothing more than a hard-driving businessman. No firm commitment had been made to Brown for either the purchase of land or the revolvers. Stearns would not be prodded further. He responded to Brown with two stinging letters of rebuff. On May 4 Stearns told Brown that he and Lawrence had not been able to raise the full subscription. As a result, Lawrence had written to Gerrit Smith asking him to "accept the 600 dollars now raised" and take a mortgage from Brown for 400 dollars. Smith had agreed to these conditions. Two days later Stearns suggested Brown accept the proposition "to mortgage for 400 dollars" and advised the Kansas warrior that the committee would try to raise the rest of the money at some other time.<sup>17</sup>

In these two letters and his response to Foster, Stearns had firmly presented his case. The subscription had only been "partly promised" and it had been difficult to fill. The committee was not reneging on its agreement and Brown should understand the great difficulty in procuring funds. He should settle for partial payment. The Medford manufacturer believed his frank discussion of the matter would stop Brown from making any more unreasonable demands. In fact, Stearns was so sure he had resolved the problem that he felt

well enough to make a staunch appeal in the Kansas warrior's behalf before the National Kansas Committee on May 10 in New York City. In his brief address to committee members, Stearns spoke of his personal acquaintance with Brown and his "great confidence" in the man's "courage, prudence, and good judgment." Stearns begged the committee to reconsider its decision to withhold funds. The men of the committee must keep uppermost in mind Brown's "control of the whole affair." Stearns stressed that Brown's discipline and experience would give even the most timorous freestate men "confidence in their cause."<sup>18</sup>

But if George Luther Stearns thought his frank discussion of the subscription would placate Brown, he was wrong. The letters only relieved Stearns' anxieties, Brown was still irate. He determined to have every penny of the land subscription made up. On May 10, he met with Smith and the Thompsons at Peterboro, notified them of his intention to obtain the full subscription, and dismissed Smith's suggestion that he settle for what had been offered. Three days later, he wrote a long letter to Stearns explaining his position. He prefaced his remarks with a biting introduction. Brown felt he "must have" the 1000 dollars "made up at once." The Kansas warrior claimed he had not started the measure though he was "sufficiently needy" and, in rather surly tones, apologized if his demands were "hindering" either Stearns or Lawrence. The Kansas fighter then discussed the

nature of his intended purchase in detail hoping it would give greater validity to his demand. Brown claimed he had agreed to purchase the land from "two young men" named Thompson. They had previously obtained the acreage from Smith and had made a number of improvements on it. The Thompson's still owed a balance of 200 dollars to Smith which Brown intended to pay. Then, he would use the remaining 300 dollars to complete the deal. The Thompsons were expecting that sum and had already negotiated for another nearby farm on the basis of that expectation.<sup>19</sup>

Brown also pushed young Sanborn to see to it that the money was "promptly raised." Invoking the secretary's pledge that it would be an "honor" to serve him or his family in any way possible, Brown wrote Sanborn on May 15 and suggested that a full subscription was "much the cheapest" and "most proper" way to provide for his family's welfare. It would also be "far less humiliating" for his wife. Aside from highlighting the intensity of his campaign for funds, the letter to Sanborn suggests how well Brown gauged the personality of the secretary and how deftly he operated in terms of that assessment. He knew Sanborn had a strong sense of family and would have a hard time backing down from his pledge to "take it on himself" to see that Brown's family needs were met. To the businessman Stearns, Brown had sent a detailed analysis of the purchase agreement, to young Sanborn an emotional plea about family needs. Brown knew his men well and

operated on his knowledge. In addition, Brown knew how sensitive Sanborn was on the issue of organizing aid for Kansas but not actually participating in settlement. And he exploited the guilt fully. Brown closed his letter to Sanborn by claiming that he would never have uttered a syllable about the land purchase were he "not conscious that I am performing that service which is equally the duty of millions who need not forego a single hearty dinner by efforts they are called to make." The lines stung the sensitive young committee secretary so much that he hardly noticed Brown's concluding assertion that he really didn't want to burden Stearns and Lawrence nor "ride free horses" until they fell dead.<sup>20</sup>

Brown's letter caused Sanborn much discomfort. Brown was forcing him to push Stearns on the land subscription issue and it was a task Sanborn did not relish. Sanborn realized how much Stearns had already done for Brown and what difficulty he was having in filling up the subscription. Brown was unfairly pressuring the Medford lead-pipe manufacturer. After debating his course for a day, Sanborn went to Medford on May 16 still undecided about whether or not he should broach the issue with Stearns. Sanborn had not resolved where the bounds on his loyalty to Brown began and his friendship with Stearns left off.<sup>21</sup>

By the time he arrived at Stearns' Medford home, Sanborn had decided to at least show Brown's letter to the committee

chairman. After reading it Stearns reciprocated by showing Sanborn his own letter from Brown and denying that he and Lawrence had ever committed themselves to the subscription as fully as Brown implied. Stearns claimed he had originally refused outright to undertake the responsibility and advised Brown to seek aid from Lawrence. When Lawrence refused, it had been Brown who kept the subject alive not Stearns or Lawrence. But even though the Medford businessman was upset by Brown's insinuations Sanborn sensed that he was not angry enough to sever his affiliation with the warrior. During the remainder of the meeting Sanborn began to understand why this was so. Stearns showed the young secretary a letter he had recently received from Martin Conway, one of the committee's agents in Kansas. According to Conway freestate efforts to organize their own legislature at Topeka were likely to be "supressed by corruption." Freestate men were "increasingly . . . entering all around into business with proslavery men." James Lane and Charles Robinson were trying to counter the fraudulently elected proslavery legislature at Shawnee Mission with their own extra-legal freestate legislative body but if Conway's views were correct the project was doomed. There would be no counter-force to proslavery political efforts. And when Stearns tied this possibility to the realization that a rigged, proslavery constitutional convention was to meet at Lecompton in June and would surely vote a pro-slavery document, he was pessimistic about political efforts

to win freedom in Kansas. Brown's words were biting, unfair, and partially untrue but his valor and desire to fight for freedom in Kansas were beyond doubt. Stearns had resolved to continue his support of the warrior. Sanborn was further convinced of Stearns' willingness to continue aiding Brown despite the friction over the North Elba land subscription when the committee chairman showed him a reply he had recently drafted to T. W. Carter of the Massachusetts Arms Company. In the reply, Stearns presumed Carter wished him to be "responsible" for the purchase price of the 200 revolvers "until . . . paid by Captain Brown." Stearns notified Carter that he "cheerfully" assented to the wish. Before he left Stearns' home Sanborn also helped the chairman draft a letter to Brown explaining that he (Stearns) had agreed with Lawrence to make up the full subscription. Stearns told Brown that he would inform Lawrence that he "must fulfill the agreement." Four days later, Sanborn wrote a letter of his own to Brown. In it he assured Brown that he need have "no fear" about the money. It would be gathered up and put in the "right hands." Sanborn agreed that it would be a "sad thing" if Brown's family were not taken care of while he was exposing himself to danger in Kansas for "the good of others." But the secretary did have some disappointing news. The "arts of politicians" had defeated the Massachusetts appropriation for Kansas.<sup>22</sup>

Sensing a distinct change in attitude about the subscription, Brown sent a temperate response to Stearns. His letter of May 23 was an attempt to do his part to ease tensions which had arisen over the issue and to prevent any further misunderstandings. Once again he explained the North Elba deal to Stearns, assuring him that there had been no collusion between himself, the Thompsons, and Smith and that he had no "previous arrangement" with Smith about the land purchase other than to say he wanted Smith's contract with the Thompsons' made over to himself on payment. Brown wished to demonstrate that he had pressed for the full subscription only because it was promised and not because he was bound to a prior contract. Brown swore that Smith had given him "no encouragement" about the purchase and had simply agreed to the "arrangement." Brown also hoped to prevent any mistaken assumptions about how much Smith had pledged to him in Kansas aid. He preferred Stearns' annoyance in knowing Smith refused to give money because the previous year's effort had "embarrassed him," to Stearns' anger at being deceived. Brown told Stearns that rumors about Smith assisting his Kansas work were false. All Smith promised was that he would do "all he could" when the "struggle was renewed."<sup>23</sup>

The letter does seem to have reassured the Medford businessman. He forgave Brown's insinuations and believed Smith's behavior in the affair was proper. In fact, Stearns vigorously prodded Lawrence's efforts to fill the



subscription even though Lawrence continued to assert that he had never intended to do any more than "write a 'heading'" for the fund. Before leaving Medford that June for a vacation in New Hampshire with his family, Stearns exchanged letters with Martin Conway. The letters further explain his willingness to continue support of Brown. Conway was certain that the new territorial governor, ex-Mississippi Senator Robert Walker, would attempt to disband the freestate Topeka legislature. Although Conway claimed to have confidence in the "instincts of the masses," he confessed that he agreed with Stearns' evaluation of the situation. If freestate men were defeated in the "Topeka business" they should, as Stearns had suggested, "marshal armed forces for further action." George Luther Stearns' fears about the destruction of freestate political efforts, Walker's proslavery leanings, and the likely possibility of a proslavery constitution from the Lecompton Convention, prompted his support of Brown in spite of his irritation over the land subscription. Political antislavery had been defeated too often by the Slave Power. Only men like Brown who were willing to fight for freedom could prevent a proslavery takeover in the territory. Brown must be supported.<sup>24</sup>

Near the end of June, Gerrit Smith also became convinced that "fighting for Liberty" was the only way to assure the survival of a free Kansas. Smith watched with mounting anger as freestate efforts to form a legislature were ruled illegal

by Walker and proslavery delegates debated the Lecompton Constitution. Addressing a Milwaukee personal liberty law meeting, the Peterboro philanthropist also lashed out at the Supreme Court for the "naked despotism" it displayed in handing down the Dred Scott decision. A government that didn't "promise protection in return for allegiance" was "not a government at all." When asked if he would let the decision "arouse people to rebel against the Supreme Court," Smith labeled such a question as "foolish." The Supreme Court was the "rebel." It had refused to consider the Higher Law.<sup>25</sup>

Smith met John Brown in Chicago late in June as the warrior moved west to Kansas. It was a month since the two men had spoken and in the interim the ever-changing Smith decided he would contribute to Brown's Kansas work. Despite his claims a few weeks earlier that his means were "exhausted," he insisted Brown draw on him for 350 dollars and left Chicago believing that freestate men "must not shrink" from fighting for freedom even if federal troops were used against them.<sup>26</sup>

### III

When Brown finally returned to Kansas in early July after an absence of almost eight months he saw a number of hopeful signs for the triumph of the freestate cause. A large emigration that spring swelled the ranks of freestate settlers in the territory to the point where they vastly

outnumbered their proslavery counterparts. Lane, Robinson, and other leaders had accepted Walker's call to participate in legislative elections scheduled for the territory that October. They firmly believed freestate men could gain political control of the territory and displace the bogus Shawnee Mission assemblage. While there were still isolated outbreaks of violence, most freestate men agreed with their leaders about resolving the issue of slavery in the territory by political methods.<sup>27</sup>

As he assessed the situation and recuperated from a debilitating attack of the ague, Brown realized that there was an excellent possibility for the peaceful resolution of the slavery problem in the territory. As a result, he spent more and more time thinking about and preparing for his insurrectionary strike. Brown also realized that he might soon have to prevail on his Massachusetts "friends" for financing and so made it a point to keep them informed of his movements. Some years before at the time of his failure in the wool business, Brown and his son, John Jr., had discussed the reasons for that failure. John Jr. felt that one of the habits which had done "much injury" to them while engaged in "business connections" was their failure to maintain proper communication with business partners. They should have given a "narrative . . . detailed account of all transactions of interest as well as plans and bearings." This oversight led to "groundless suspicions" or at least

"uneasiness" among their associates. Brown's son hoped they could "mend" the habit so as to "lessen" the occasions of fault-finding in the future.<sup>28</sup>

Brown tried to prevent "groundless suspicions" from erupting with his May 23 letter to Stearns. Now, as he witnessed the new direction of Kansas affairs and realized he might soon have to call on Massachusetts "friends" to subsidize his plan to attack slavery in the South, the Kansas warrior used the autobiographical sketch he promised to young Henry Stearns to further allay any tension which had developed over the North Elba matter and to subtly hint of future endeavors. Brown's letter to the Stearns boy is a revealing biographical and psychological document but it is also a carefully constructed tactical device which was designed (like Brown's March broadside and April Farewell) to cultivate confidence in his character. While the letter tells us a great deal about the values of John Brown, it should be remembered that the Kansas warrior was quite cognizant of who he was aiming the letter at and, therefore, it is far from being a spontaneous, free-flowing outburst of thoughts and emotions. Rather, it must be seen as a carefully constructed appeal which sought to highlight the values Brown sensed would engender the utmost confidence in his character among his Boston "friends." Thus, the letter tells us as much about their values as it does Brown's.

Brown began the brief autobiography by speaking of the "necessity" of a "severe but much needed course of discipline" in the early years of his development. He then quickly moved to a consideration of the origins of his abolitionism by describing slavery's disruptive effect on family life. He spoke of his encounter with the brutal treatment of a "young negro boy." The incident brought him to reflect on the "wretched condition of Fatherless and motherless slave children" who had no one to "protect and provide" for them. As a youth Brown spoke of becoming "ambitious to excel in anything he undertook to perform" and indicated that "this kind of feeling" was one he would "recommend to all young persons." Subtly hinting of his future plans and at the same time extolling the virtue of having a well-thought-out direction in life, Brown wished young Henry Stearns to always have some "definite plan." Many men had none or, if they did, never stuck to it. This was "not the case" with John Brown. He followed up with "tenacity" whatever he set about doing "so long as it answered his general purpose." As a result, he "rarely failed" to effect the "things he undertook." In fact, he "habitually expected to succeed." And he always united such feelings with the consciousness that his plans were "right in themselves." Near the end of the letter, Brown once again tried to ease any frayed sensibilities resulting from the North Elba issue. Almost apologetically

he suggested that his "habit of being obeyed" occasionally prompted him to speak in an "imperious way."<sup>29</sup>

Brown also appended a short note to his autobiographical account which informed his Boston associates of other sums that had been contributed to him. At Hartford and New Haven he had been promised 1000 dollars but had only received 285 dollars. He chose to forget Smith's Chicago draft for 350 dollars and claimed the Peterboro squire had only supplied him with 50 dollars for Kansas. Smith also loaned him 110 dollars to pay the Thompsons' while the subscription was being filled. The Kansas warrior gently prodded his Massachusetts readers to continue efforts to raise the land money since the unpaid bill for the purchase had "exceedingly mortified" him.<sup>30</sup>

The autobiographical account was a brilliantly successful effort to prepare his listeners for his future antislavery efforts and a perfect reaffirmation of the value system which ingratiated him with Boston antislavery men that spring. He was following John Jr.'s advice in trying to allay "groundless suspicions" and was again restating the values that gave his Boston friends confidence in his character. He had a keen organizational sense, was disciplined, controlled, ambitious, and confident of success. He, like his Boston friends, loathed slavery for its attack on the fundamental institution of the family. Brown did not stress his belief that violence was the only way to destroy slavery.

The men in Boston who had contributed to his support admired his courage and his resolution to resist slavery forcibly. But it was not primarily this which gave them confidence in the Kansas warrior. They were chiefly looking for someone whose system of beliefs was similar to their own and who, by the logical extension of that system, despised the institution of slavery. Brown's mid-July letter to Henry Stearns reflects his own understanding of this situation and his understanding of their ambivalence toward violence.

By early August, Lawrence and Stearns filled the subscription and sent Sanborn to Peterboro with the 1000 dollar draft. The young committeeman was happy to make the trip. It gave him a chance to visit with Edwin Morton, the Harvard classmate who was tutoring Smith's children, and provided an opportunity to meet Smith himself. After delivering the draft, Sanborn wrote to Parker and suggested that he believed Smith to be a "greater man" than people in New England realized. He was a superior individual who had "regular devotion to his ideas" and "great personal influence." But the real highlight of Sanborn's journey was his visit with Brown's family. The young secretary gave Mary Brown a small sum of cash left over from the subscription after the payment to Smith and assured her that she could count on Brown's Boston associates if anything should happen to her husband.<sup>31</sup>

No doubt the impressionable and somewhat romantic young man saw the Browns' poverty as a noble symbol of their

heroic sacrifice for freedom. The deferential tone of his next letter to John Brown indicates how much the visit to North Elba reinforced Sanborn's desire to dedicate himself to the Kansas warrior. Sanborn notified Brown that the autobiographical letter was "well appreciated" by all who read it and that the land purchase money had been turned over to Smith. The secretary "regretted" that the payments had been "delayed so long." Forgetting Brown's pressure tactics and his somewhat distorted view of who originated the idea of a subscription, Sanborn suggested the delay had been Boston's fault and not Brown's. It was the result of a "series of mistakes" on the part of Brown's Boston "friends." In some sense, Sanborn's estimation was truer than he realized. The "mistake" these Boston "friends" made about Brown was in failing to recognize that the major portion of his life had been spent as a hard-driving yet unsuccessful business man. They failed to realize that although Brown was pleading for the noble cause of Kansas freedom, he treated his fund-raising efforts like any other business promotion. They failed to realize the paradox of his own and their own value system. That system had been created by and had, in turn, helped create the marketplace North--a place that alternately appalled and encompassed them.<sup>32</sup>



## IV

It is ironic that by the time Brown received notification of payment from Sanborn, the men who contributed most to his fund-raising drive began to back away from even advocating force as the only solution to the Kansas struggle. They did so for a variety of reasons, the most essential being a belief that Governor Walker's promise to keep the October territorial election free from fraud was given in good faith. If freestaters could gain control of the territorial legislature they could thwart any effort to force slavery upon Kansas. When Brown himself saw there was little chance of "major disturbances" erupting in Kansas that August and decided to "work back Eastward," he wrote Stearns on August 10 asking for "secret service" money with no questions asked. Stearns rebuffed his request by flatly refusing it. Stearns was caught up in the financial panic that struck the entire country that summer and fall. Peter Butler, the man who had rescued Stearns in 1853, was in desperate straits after losing large sums of money investing in the Michigan Central Railroad. It took Stearns and a number of others the entire summer and fall to gather enough money to cover Butler's debts. He could do nothing for Brown.<sup>33</sup>

Actually, there was much more to Stearns' reluctance than Butler's fiscal headache. The Medford businessman was participating in Massachusetts efforts to raise cash to

assist freestate political chances in the October election. In the fall of 1857, when freestaters took control of the legislature, Stearns reversed his springtime assessment about the necessity of "force of arms" and became convinced that antislavery men would triumph by political methods. And by November 17 he wrote Brown cautioning him not to attack pro-slavery forces unless he was attacked first. To make certain Brown heeded his advice, Stearns wrote to E. B. Whitman, an agent of the committee, and ordered Brown's access to committee funds and the 7000 dollar personal authorization closed. Stearns claimed Brown had been given authority to draw on him only "in a certain contingency." Since that contingency had not occurred it would be "very unwise" to attempt to "establish order by force." Brown could not use any of Stearns' funds for that purpose. The Medford businessman now believed the freestaters "true policy" was to "meet the enemy at the polls and vote them down."<sup>34</sup>

Stearns' retreat from the advocacy of violent means mirrored a similar process in Samuel Gridley Howe. In late spring, Howe journeyed to Kansas with small sums for the freestate cause. On the trip he encountered Senator Henry Wilson who was also going to the territory. Wilson hoped to "persuade" freestaters to vote in the October election called by Walker. At the time, Howe was "undecided" as to whether freestaters should participate. He was still confident in Brown and the logic of force. This confidence is

documented in a letter Howe sent to the Kansas warrior in mid-June. Ostensibly, the doctor was concerned with Brown's physical health, but his words reveal as much about his allegiance to the freedom fighter and force. Howe, whose own physical condition had been ravaged by the tensions, cares, and the responsibilities of his personal and professional life, saw similar signs in Brown during the early spring. Now, in Kansas, the Boston physician heard rumors that Brown was seriously ill. Howe wrote the warrior to give him the counsel of someone who could "understand and appreciate you." It was important for Brown "to live and be in health" in order to carry out his "noble purpose." Howe was convinced Brown could properly care for himself because Brown understood his own constitution and had the "self command" necessary to obey the "laws of God" when he knew them. Brown must not let excessive activity "burn him up." He had an "organization of rare power." The doctor, who had dabbled in phenology, also believed Brown had an "uncommon development" of the "moral regions." It was a "great gift" to be "cherished" and used in the "cause of humanity."<sup>35</sup>

But despite his understanding of the energy demands of professional life and his regard for Brown's "self command," by the end of June, Howe also began to look for a political solution to Kansas troubles. He backed away from his earlier, tentative commitment to the use of violence in Kansas. At a private meeting called by Henry Wilson in late June,

Howe joined Stearns, Lawrence, and others in raising 2500 dollars to help carry the October election. By mid-July the group appointed Thomas J. Marsh to bring almost 3000 dollars to freestate leaders. The money was to be "judiciously" used for election purposes. It is interesting to note that in less than three weeks Howe and the others had been able to raise a sum it took Brown almost four months to acquire. By mid-November the Boston physician had fully followed Stearns lead. In the wake of the freestate election success, he warned Brown not to attack Missouri border "ruffians."<sup>36</sup>

Like Stearns, Howe was also influenced by financial reasons to pull back from Brown's support. That fall, when his good friend Horace Mann came east to collect money for a college building, Howe indicated the severity of the financial panic griping New England when he suggested to Mann that though Moses got "water out of granite" he doubted Mann would be "as successful" among panic-stricken Bostonians. Howe himself was "cramped" and "pinched" by his falling income.<sup>37</sup>

Gerrit Smith joined Howe and Stearns in their retreat. Two months after he had given Brown 350 dollars to help freestaters "fight for Liberty," he was attending a compensated emancipation convention in Cleveland. In a speech before the group, Smith asserted that since slavery was a "national dilemma" and all men contributed to it, the North should help the South remove the institution. He was willing to make a "direct appeal" to the selfish slaveholder if it meant

hurrying that slaveholder to dissolve his immoral relationship with the black man. Smith was careful to avoid accepting the Dred Scott decision. He was seeking to buy slaves not because they were property but because he felt northerners had a "moral right" to help "slave owner and slave." Smith, like most abolitionists, was as worried about slavery's effect on white slaveholders as on black slaves. Though his position on compensated emancipation was not a complete break with past ideas about force, his support for the movement does indicate a growing willingness to try buying slavery off instead of fighting it off.<sup>38</sup>

When William Lloyd Garrison labeled Smith's address as "another gyration," the Peterboro squire claimed to be deeply "pained" at so "palpable an injustice." But he soon dropped his advocacy of compensated emancipation. Perhaps in an effort to reestablish his abolitionist credentials with Garrison and other less radical antislavery proponents, Smith used his annual Jerry Rescue speech on October 1, 1857 to reassert his belief in moral suasion and political abolition. He also played down his advocacy of violent methods. In the speech, Smith asked if "we would have the slaves rescued by violence" and answered with a resounding "No!" Smith felt it would be "wicked" to make such a request. There was a better way. All people had to do was "vote the Federal Government into the hands of abolitionists and every chain would fall peacefully from every slave."<sup>39</sup>

## V

Unlike his colleagues who quickly retreated from belief in the necessity of forcible means as soon as the possibility of a favorable political solution presented itself in Kansas, young Frank Sanborn left that belief reluctantly. For him, retreat from force was tantamount to a retreat from Brown himself. And this was difficult for the young committeeman. Sanborn felt his whole role in the freestate movement, abolitionism, and reformist Boston society depended on his relationship to Brown. To retreat from support of Brown was, in many ways, to deny the symbol of his own significance. Nor would the crafty Brown allow such a retreat to take place. After Sanborn sent his deferential confirmation of the North Elba purchase, for instance, Brown was quick to document his gratitude and imply his great need for Sanborn's efforts. Brown was thankful his wife and daughters would not be "drawn to beg" or become a "burden" to his "Poor Boys" who had "nothing but their hands to begin with." Brown was grateful to have found friends to "look after his family;" friends who were acquainted with their "real condition."<sup>40</sup>

Prompted by the confidence Brown seemed to be placing in him and his own desire to preserve the relationship, Sanborn, in early September, made a bold effort to tap the seemingly untouchable reserves of the Worcester County Committee. Claiming that he had been informed that there was

"a large sum" of money (some 3000 dollars) being held by the committee, Sanborn aggressively asserted to Higginson that there was "no reason" why it should be "kept idle." He wanted it donated to Brown. Higginson was furious at Sanborn for making such demands. He immediately wrote back and told the secretary that he had no control over the money of the Worcester committee. And even if he did, he wouldn't have given it for Brown's "useless" efforts. The sharp response flustered Sanborn and he immediately toned down his condemnation of the Worcester group. In the face of Higginson's angry reply, Sanborn admitted his "own two or three" committees had not excelled in giving Brown aid and that all free-state committees were "culpably negligent." Worcester's committee was "no worse than the rest." Sanborn was deeply upset at Higginson's assertions of Brown's "uselessness" and defended the Kansas warrior's inactivity during the summer by claiming that Governor Walker had knowledge of his purposes and was "watching for him." John Brown was as "ready for Revolution" as any man. All he needed was money and he would be the "best Disunion champion" found. Perhaps hinting at Brown's plans for insurrection or at least restating his own resolute commitment to Brown and forceful means, Sanborn concluded his letter to Higginson by suggesting that with 100 men raised and drilled Brown would "do more to split the Union than any man alive."<sup>41</sup>

Sanborn's letters to Brown during the late summer and early fall also indicate his refusal to desert the warrior's side. When it seemed that the bogus Lecompton Constitution would not be submitted to the people of the territory, Sanborn declared to Brown that it would be best if the officers of the proslavery government were "hung." Sanborn was extremely apologetic for Stearns' failure to send "secret service" money. He explained that money was "very scarce" and the committee's treasury was exhausted. When Brown continued his regular correspondence with Sanborn in spite of the other committee member's waning interest, the young secretary became even more respectful. He was glad to be getting these continual reports. It made him believe that Lane and Brown were the only "real generals" to be found in the territory.<sup>42</sup>

In December two months after freestate settlers had captured the territorial legislature and seemed in a good position to prevent the Lecompton Constitution from being forced on Kansas, Sanborn finally conceded that the situation could be settled by politics though he claimed he would "not be surprised" if Brown's "courage and arms" were again needed there.<sup>43</sup>

Sanborn's absorption with Brown is not only reflected in his seemingly die-hard commitment to force but also in the Brown-like tones of his speech and thought. By late fall of 1857, Sanborn was exhausted with his committee work. The



constant trips to Boston, never-ending committee correspondence, and his occasional schoolteaching activity tired him. His response to this state of mental and physical fatigue is curiously reminiscent of Brown's. In order to regain his strength and energy, Sanborn decided to forego the "pleasures of visiting Boston." It was time to "deny" himself the company of "social flatterers" and retire to "regions where everything passes for what it is." And like Howe and Higginson who looked for simplicity in Kansas, Sanborn wanted a place where he could "avoid the distractions of life," where he could order his existence, and, like his hero Brown, devote himself more closely "to study and meditation" not only of books "but of life itself." Sanborn wanted to rid himself of the pressures and tensions which arose when one made abolitionism a "business and study." Sanborn, like Brown in his autobiographical account, felt the need to "eradicate" certain "evil tendencies" from his "present way of life." He was looking for the benefits of "severe discipline." He was willing to "live like a monk" for a while. It was time to retire to his "cell." Husbanding precious energy was imperative for the young professional--a career could be exhausting.<sup>44</sup>

## CHAPTER V

During mid-March 1857, in the midst of his quest for Kansas funds, John Brown journeyed to New York City for an interview with an ex-soldier of fortune named Hugh Forbes whose lecture circuit appearances in the East had earned him a modest reputation as a military expert. Forbes, an Englishman, had come to New York a few years earlier after spending two years as a field commander in Garibaldi's army of Italian volunteers. His particular expertise lay in the use of guerrilla tactics and Brown hoped to recruit the man to help in Kansas and with future attacks upon slavery. After lengthy discussions, Brown hired Forbes for six months. As soon as the Englishman could put his personal affairs in order he was to go to Kansas and begin training Brown's recruits. Forbes was to receive 100 dollars a month for his services and Brown seems to have hinted that he might count on a longer term of employment if certain "New England humanitarians" agreed to subsidize his future efforts. Hugh Forbes was quick to enter the arrangement. His lecture circuit appearances and part-time newspaper work had not provided sufficient funds to take care of his wife and children who still lived in Paris. He needed money desperately.<sup>1</sup>

Right from the beginning of their relationship, however, problems developed between Brown and Forbes. The ex-soldier

demanded to be paid the 600 dollars in advance and then was slow in joining Brown out west. When Forbes did reach Mt. Tabor, Iowa, and started drilling Brown's recruits in early July, he urged that Brown reimburse him for money he had spent preparing a military tactics manual. In addition to the friction caused by his tardiness and financial demands, Forbes argued with Brown about how the recruits should be trained. Both men were convinced of their "unchallengeable expertise" in guerrilla warfare and had a difficult time accepting criticism. Then, in August, when Brown began to reveal his plan for an attack on slavery in the South, their arguments became even more heated. Forbes had his own ideas about which type of foray would be most successful. He wanted to "muster along the northern slave frontier" with a highly trained group of "carefully selected colored and white persons." The former field commander wanted to "instigate a series of slave stampedes, running Negroes into Canada." In the process he hoped to render "slave property untenable." Brown firmly rejected Forbes' scheme. He had his own plan, one which he had been working on for "many years." The Kansas warrior prepared himself by reading numerous works on guerrilla tactics and carefully examining topographical maps of the southern states. Brown wanted to recruit twenty-five well-trained, well-armed men, "colored and white mixed" and supply them with pikes. The Kansas warrior would use this cadre to "Beat up a Slave Quarter in Virginia." While both

plans seemed similar, major disagreement arose over the predictability of a slave response to such a venture. Forbes was uncertain slaves would or could respond and felt strongly that they should somehow be warned of the impending attack. Brown was sure a warning wasn't necessary. He was "certain of a response." Once the attack had begun between 200 and 500 slaves would join him. He would then take 80 to 100 men and "make a dash" against the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. After the assault, Brown would lead the entire group into the Virginia mountains and hold on there until his "New England partisans" called a convention to "overthrow the proslavery administration."<sup>2</sup>

Because of constant disputes with Brown about training techniques, the plan, and finances, Forbes left Mt. Tabor in mid-November. Brown was disappointed to lose Forbes' obvious military skills. At the same time, he was relieved to be rid of the only man in the small group who seriously questioned his authority. But it was not the last Brown would hear from the ex-soldier of fortune. Two months later, in mid-January of 1858, the disconsolate Forbes threatened to destroy Brown's plan before it could be implemented. In letters to Franklin Sanborn, Forbes alleged that the "New England Humanitarians" and, in particular, Sanborn had violated their financial obligations. According to the soldier, Brown had promised to pay him 100 dollars a month for a year and had reneged on his commitment. Forbes suggested that Brown had

not been able to pay him because New Englanders failed to supply sufficient funds.<sup>3</sup>

Sanborn was angered by these allegations and claimed he "never heard of such an arrangement." The secretary assured Forbes that if he or other committeemen had known about such a contractual arrangement they would have made it their business to see that it was kept. Sanborn angrily asserted that he would never have let Forbes' family suffer for want of money. The secretary further claimed that he was "not guilty" of cheating on or lying about the agreement. And he rebuked Forbes for his "abusive language." But it was more than Forbes' accusations that upset Sanborn. For the first time the young secretary doubted Brown's competence. He began to understand, as Stearns had during the land subscription episode, that Brown could be something less than selflessly heroic. Indeed, Brown could be "imperious," insensitive, and mistaken in his judgments of character. Sanborn immediately wrote to the Kansas warrior and asked what misinformation Forbes had been given. Sanborn also wondered why Brown had not written the soldier to defend his Boston "friends."<sup>4</sup>

Sanborn's letter jarred Brown. He could not afford to lose the confidence of his most dedicated and efficient Boston "agent" at a time when he was about to request money for his Harpers Ferry raid. Nor could the veteran allow Forbes to threaten his plans with any further disclosures.

Such revelations not only destroyed confidence but neutralized the plan's element of surprise. Once again, in a moment of desperation, Brown sought the assistance of his son, John Jr., and asked him to deal with the situation by sending Forbes a "sharpe" and "well-merited rebuke." John Jr. should notify the disgruntled soldier that he had not been "engaged for a year" as he claimed and that Brown did not "accept it well" to be asked to state an "untruth." John Jr. followed his father's advice. He wrote Forbes and berated him for his "spiteful letters." They had done "great injury" because they had "weakened" his father's "hands" with Massachusetts supporters. The letter John Jr. sent was temporarily effective. Hugh Forbes became silent--but only for a few weeks.<sup>5</sup>

Forbes' defection and his resulting attempt to seek funds from the Boston committeemen worried Brown. It created doubts about his competence among those he was about to ask to subsidize an insurrectionary thrust at slavery. Yet it was only one of a number of aggravating problems he faced in the fall and early winter. During that period he was plagued by recurring attacks of the ague, his funds dwindled, and he had to watch as freestate settlers voted themselves into power and eliminated the necessity of his violent efforts for Kansas. The October elections of 1857 put a freestate representative in Congress and captured 33 of 52 seats in the territorial legislature. By early January of 1858, the legislature had even blocked submission of the fraudulent,

proslavery Lecompton Constitution to Congress before it could be voted on by the territory's settlers. It troubled Brown to see this political solution for he realized it would hasten the retreat of his Boston allies from their radical professions of the previous spring. He had to move quickly if he wanted to capitalize on what sentiment remained for the use of violent means against slavery. By mid-January, he had gathered his recruits, arms, and supplies at Mt. Tabor, traveled eastward through Ohio, and settled in upper New York state. During the journey Brown continued to discuss his scheme, slowly revealing additional segments, and preparing his men for their "ultimate destination" in Virginia.<sup>6</sup>

By January 28, 1858, the Kansas warrior sequestered himself in the Syracuse home of Fredrick Douglass and set about "perfecting" his "Virginia Plan." He drew up a "Provisional Constitution" which he hoped would eliminate "anarchy and confusion" once he was established in his mountain fortress. He also hoped it would demonstrate the care with which he developed his "definite plan" to end slavery. After completing work on the document, he began his effort to enlist the support of Gerrit Smith and the Bostonian allies, Sanborn, Stearns, Parker, Howe, and Higginson. The letters Brown sent to his Boston friends were models of calculation and amply testify to his acute understanding of the men with whom he was dealing. Each request for help was carefully worded and neatly tailored to the personality of the recipient. Brown

appealed to Higginson (perpetually concerned with his manliness) as both a "true man and true abolitionist" and sought "secret service" money for the "most important undertaking" of his whole life. The Kansas warrior needed 500 to 800 dollars in sixty days. Claiming he had already written to Parker, Stearns, and Sanborn about the project, Brown continued his subtle appeal to Higginson's ego by noting that he was depending on the Worcester activist because he "did not know as either Mr. Stearns or Mr. Sanborn are abolitionists." In view of Brown's past assistance from both Sanborn and Stearns, his comments to Higginson were a rather cynical assessment of both men's abolitionism. But Brown was determined to have Higginson's participation in the venture even if he had to flatter the minister at the expense of those who had already done so much for him. Besides, Brown was just as determined that this would be his "last effort in the begging line." He would do whatever necessary to insure a successful effort.<sup>7</sup>

Higginson's response was equal to Brown's plea. Higginson claimed he was "always ready to invest money in treason" but at present had "none to invest." His friends were either unwilling or "bankrupt." The minister also claimed to have prior obligations which demanded his attention. He was gathering funds for underground railroad activity in Kansas. However, Higginson did not want to entirely dissuade the Kansas warrior and therefore slyly alluded to



the very funds Brown was trying to obtain by hinting that he might be able to interest his county committee in supporting Brown with the "trifling balance" they had left. That "trifling balance" was exactly what Brown was pursuing and he immediately replied to the minister. Indeed, it was "Railroad business on a somewhat extended scale" which was the "identical object" for which he was "trying to get means." Brown had been connected with the underground railroad since "boyhood" and never let an "opportunity slip." Would Higginson meet him at Gerrit Smith's during the last week of February? He had a "measure on foot" that he was sure would awaken something more than a "common interest" if Higginson could hear it.<sup>8</sup>

Higginson did not go to Smith's and wasn't even sure what "railroad business on an extended scale" meant but his discussions with Sanborn led him to believe there was a possibility that Brown was contemplating a slave uprising. The thought excited him. Recently he had read about the problems caused by the "defiant and hostile attitudes of the Negro population in Louisiana, Tennessee and Arkansas." One insurrection had been fomented by a white abolitionist named Hancock who was eventually caught, tried, found innocent, and shot. If Brown was contemplating the same sort of escape, Higginson was sure his efforts were worth subsidizing. After the Burns episode, the minister had few scruples about the necessity of violence to end slavery and had repeatedly

called for its use. Then, too, along with the possibility that Brown could free substantial numbers of blacks by such an effort, Higginson was also intrigued by the impact such a raid would have on public opinion. He was disturbed by the lost influence of the "radical antislavery element." Supporting Brown's effort might be a good way to reestablish that influence. Hadn't his Burns rescue attempt, Sumner's beating, and the bloody struggle for a free Kansas done much to rekindle antislavery fervor?<sup>9</sup>

John Brown also wrote to Theodore Parker during the first week in February. He told Parker he was "perfecting arrangements" for an "important measure" and was counting on Parker's assistance because their "mutual friends" were not as "deeply-dyed" in abolition as the minister. None of them understood his views "so well." Brown's determined effort to secure Parker's assistance is revealing. Of all the Boston "friends" Parker had been least supportive. The minister did little to obtain funds for Brown in 1857 and had flatly refused the warrior's request to read the Farewell before his congregation. But Brown sensed Parker's ability to influence efforts on his behalf. Parker was the one that Howe, Stearns, and Sanborn would seek in attempting to justify their support of the plan. Brown needed the minister's seal of approval. The importance of the meeting at Parker's home one year earlier had not been lost on the warrior. Boston abolitionists had not gathered there simply as a matter of

convenience. The meeting was also symbolic. Parker was the undeclared leader of all Massachusetts antislavery men who entertained notions of using violent means against slavery. Even if Parker was ambivalent about the actual subsidization of the project, his theoretical justification was vital.<sup>10</sup>

Brown also wrote to George Luther Stearns requesting the Medford businessman to come to Smith's in late February and listen to the plan. Stearns, however, had recently returned from a business trip to New York City and was too tired to make another journey so soon. Nor was he really sure he wanted to do anything for Brown. In fact, the pressures of economic panic prompted Stearns to request that Brown return money provided for his Kansas work. The financially harried lead-pipe manufacturer was no longer ready to "invest in treason." Brown had received money previously but it had not been given "under obligation." Kansas settlers no longer needed aid in "defending themselves from marauders." Their "true course" was "to meet the enemy at the ballot box" and "vote them down." And since the contingency for which Stearns had given his "pledge" ceased to exist he wanted remaining sums "returned without conditions." Stearns claimed he was not "indifferent" to Brown's request but would only aid the warrior when it was "proper" to do so. Now, with friends being dragged under by economic panic and Kansas ready to resolve its problems politically, Stearns doubted the "propriety" of a contribution. Stearns was also angered

by Forbes' accusations and wanted to know why the soldier wrote such "abusive letters" to Brown's Boston associates. Unquestionably Stearns reticence to contribute was also conditioned by a growing skepticism about Brown's competence.<sup>11</sup>

Frank Sanborn received two letters from Brown in the first week of February. But quite unlike the past, this time the young secretary was more cautious in his response to the warrior's requests. Sanborn was still upset by the "slandorous and insulting tone" of the Forbes' letters and there is little doubt he placed most of the blame for the letters on Brown. Writing to Higginson on February 11, ostensibly to seek funds for Brown, the secretary spoke of his growing uncertainty. Sanborn now claimed only to have enough "confidence" in the warrior to trust him with a "moderate sum" for his new venture. The young committeeman had come a long way from his pleas for a 100,000 dollar legislative appropriation and a 5000 to 10,000 dollar grant from the National Kansas Committee for Brown's use. Sanborn was also upset by Brown's manipulation of Edwin Morton. In addition to Brown's letters, Sanborn had received a note from his Harvard classmate claiming Brown needed 500 to 800 dollars to "overthrow slavery in a large part of the country." Morton's phraseology was so reminiscent of Brown's that even Sanborn could hardly have failed to realize who actually wrote the letter. And the young secretary disliked the pressure. Sanborn's reluctance, however, was precipitated by more than Forbes' letters,

Morton's seeming manipulation, and his own scanty financial resources. The young secretary had surmised that Brown "contemplated an uprising of slaves" and that thought disturbed him more than anything else. His efforts to dispel his fears about such a scheme are obvious in the conclusion of his letter to Higginson. Sanborn half-heartedly suggested that "the Union" was "evidently on its last legs." Since Buchanan and others were "trying to tear it to pieces" he believed "treason would not be treason that much longer but patriotism." The statement was more of a question than an assertion.<sup>12</sup>

During the next week Sanborn was finally able to convince himself of his own definition of patriotism. When Brown refused the secretary's plea to come to Boston (Brown's reasons for "keeping still" were sufficient to prevent him from seeing his family), Sanborn unenthusiastically prepared for a trip to Peterboro. But it is obvious that the trip stretched the limits of his trust in and deference to Brown. Indeed, from now on Sanborn would continue to function efficiently for the Kansas warrior but never with the robust admiration, unflagging confidence, and unflinching enthusiasm which had characterized the first year of their relationship.<sup>13</sup>

Actually, John Brown did have an important reason for "keeping still" at Gerrit Smith's home. The warrior hoped to unveil his plan among those who would receive it most favorably and Smith, more than any other individual Brown sought

aid from, accepted the basic assumption on which the venture was premised. After a week of discussions with Brown, the Peterboro philanthropist claimed to be convinced of need for black violence to overturn the institution of slavery. Only in this way could white America come to a fundamental understanding of black manhood. This position was, however, not solely the result of his intense conversations with Brown. For over sixteen years Smith had debated the issue with himself. Brown's words merely culminated the debate. As early as 1842, Smith addressed slaves on how best to change the image white men had of them. Blacks were to cultivate dispositions which were becoming to "poor and afflicted men." They should always display patience, trust, and hope. A few years later the wealthy landowner advised blacks to cultivate "self-respect" in order to "peacefully regain" their rights. Although he gave such advice, Smith doubted whether blacks would ever "exert an influence for the redemption of their enslaved brethren."<sup>14</sup>

But by January of 1851, some three years after Smith attempted to found an independent black agricultural community where men could "avoid" those who hated them, the landowner's perspective on the issue of black manhood began to shift. While speaking at a state convention on the Fugitive Slave Law, Smith asserted that the "days of American slavery would be numbered" only "when white America was inspired with respect for the black man." Smith now entreated blacks to be

less deferential. They should "rise up" and quit themselves like men in all "political, ecclesiastical and social relations." Smith asserted that he no longer accepted a black man's degradation on the grounds that it was "forced." He had "comparatively no concern" for the "degradation" that came from "others," It was the black man's "self-degradation" that filled him with "sorrow." It grieved Smith to know that white men had murdered blacks but his "deepest grief" was that black men were "suicides." As is indicated by the tone of these words, Smith, throughout the 1850's, gradually moved to a position that demanded black men to actively resist white control. The world was in sad condition "until man as man. . . . for his mere manhood shall be held in honor." Then, in January of 1856, Smith wrote a letter to Salmon Chase and claimed that nothing but "prejudice against the black man" sustained slavery. "Not for a moment" could the institution "co-exist with a full sense of his [the black man's] manhood." In the third week of February 1857, as Brown awaited Sanborn's arrival (none of the others were coming) the warrior succeeded in convincing Smith that only black violence could truly demonstrate that manhood.<sup>15</sup>

## II

Huddled next to a small desk in Edwin Morton's third story bedroom at Smith's mansion, John Brown roughly outlined his proposed strike at slavery for Sanborn. The specifics of

this February 23 meeting are not recorded. But it is certain Brown told the young secretary that he had gathered a small cadre of recruits for a raid on slavery in the South. He hoped to "beat up a slave quarter," arm those slaves who rallied to his banner, attack a federal arsenal in order to get additional weapons (Brown listed a number of federal installations), and then retreat to a mountain fortress in Virginia. The fortress would serve as a station on the underground railroad and also as a base from which to launch further strikes at slavery. Brown claimed his many discussions with black leaders convinced him he could count on a response from slaves. To demonstrate that his plan was not hastily conceived, the warrior unveiled the Provisional Constitution he had drawn up at Douglass' in late January. Throughout the discussion Brown repeatedly stressed his belief that it was necessary for black men to fight for their freedom. In so doing, they would break through the debilitating effects of slavery and assert their manhood in the only way white men could fully appreciate.

Though Sanborn anticipated a plan of this sort, he was incredulous as Brown actually revealed it. The committeeman was amazed that the veteran "neither expected nor desired a large force" to make his strike and he was still disturbed by the notion of black insurrection. From Brown's hints in 1857 and the recent "intimations" of Hugh Forbes, it was obvious Brown contemplated an "uprising of slaves." Sanborn knew



this before he came to Peterboro. He said as much to Higginson two weeks earlier. But when Brown actually laid the plan before him the young secretary became confused and uncertain. Even Brown's careful "methods of organization and fortification" and his elaborate "theory of the way in which the invasion would be received in the country at large" failed to allay the committee secretary's fears. Sanborn wasn't sure that blacks would actually fight for their freedom and complained of the "manifest hopelessness" of the scheme. Brown met such expressions of doubt with quotations from the Bible and references to his numerous discussions with black leaders. In the end the young man felt cornered, left only with the alternatives of "betrayal, desertation or support."<sup>16</sup>

After hastily scribbling a note to Higginson in which he suggested that the minister ought to be in Peterboro because their "friend" was "about . . . entering into the wool business in which he has been engaged all his life" and that he had a "plan" which was the "result of many years of careful study," Sanborn asked to speak privately with Gerrit Smith. As the sun set on the snow-covered hills which surrounded the Peterboro estate, the two men walked slowly and discussed Brown's plan for over an hour. Smith claimed he fully understood Sanborn's reservations. He, too, had some doubts about black participation and the "slender means" with which Brown hoped to begin the attack. He, too, feared the possibility

that Hugh Forbes would break his silence at any moment and reveal the scheme. But black manhood could only be demonstrated by the black man's own efforts for freedom. Besides, Brown was a noble individual and truly religious man. If blacks must rise up and kill their masters what better man to lead them in such efforts. Slowly, Smith's words diffused the young secretary's anxiety--but not entirely.<sup>17</sup>

The next day, February 24, Sanborn prepared to leave Peterboro only "half convinced" that he should support Brown. He would convey the plan to his Boston associates but would only unveil the general outlines of the scheme. If Brown wanted to be sure of support he must come to Boston and fill in the details. Brown agreed and promised to be there during the first week of March. The veteran apologized for not being able to come sooner but claimed it was necessary for him to travel to New York City for important meetings with black leaders, Dr. J. N. Gloucester and J. W. Loguen, who had "whole heartedly" approved his plan. Even though Sanborn left Peterboro claiming to be only "half convinced" about the venture Brown felt confident about his support and that of the other Boston committeemen. While in the city he wrote a short note to his family which suggests how much control he felt he exerted over Sanborn. Brown stated that in the last few weeks he had had a "constant series of secret discouragement and encouragement" but felt his discussions with Sanborn would bear fruit. Indeed, the Kansas warrior claimed

it would be "a very strange thing" if Sanborn" did not join me."18

When Sanborn returned to Boston he immediately contacted Howe, Parker, Stearns, and Higginson and informed them of the plan Brown contemplated. He advised them of his own reservations and prepared them for the warrior's arrival in the first week of March. As promised, Brown appeared in Boston on March 4 and registered at the American House hotel. That same day all five of his Massachusetts confederates met him in his room. Before Brown could explain his plan he was vigorously cross-examined about Hugh Forbes. Why had Forbes made threatening accusations? What had Brown done about the soldier of fortune? What was the nature of their contractual arrangement? Brown calmly addressed their questions. He spoke of John Jr.'s letter to Forbes, told the group why Forbes had been contracted, and described his interpretation of the terms of their deal. Brown said Forbes lied when he claimed he had been promised 100 dollars a month for a year. He had only been promised 600 dollars for six months service. Forbes had been advanced the whole sum in order to take care of family problems but had vainly squandered the sum publishing his manual of tactics and then expected to be reimbursed. Brown probably admitted that Forbes knew about the aid he was receiving from New England "humanitarians" but Brown certainly denied that he ever led the soldier of fortune to believe his salary was contingent on that support.

Brown also denied that Forbes knew enough about his plan to jeopardize it even if he took it upon himself to disclose what he knew. In the end, he approached the five men as he did the National Kansas Committee one year earlier. They "knew him" and "knew he could be trusted." And in spite of some uneasiness his Boston allies did renew their trust in him. Indeed, they should have. Brown had spent over a year carefully demonstrating that he possessed the character and values which each one of them believed was necessary to produce a stable, ordered, and virtuous society. By now they could hardly reject the image he had so self-consciously displayed and they had so self-consciously demanded. To reject Brown on the basis of his character would have been to reject themselves.<sup>19</sup>

After defusing the anxiety caused by Forbes' "abusive letters," Brown began to discuss his insurrectionary scheme. Again, as at Peterboro, he stressed his belief in the necessity of black efforts for freedom. No one could give freedom to anyone. Each man had to take his own. Again, Brown asserted his conviction that blacks would fight--black leaders throughout New York, New England, and Canada had assured him of this. Only such black efforts would convince southern slaveholders and their northern sympathizers that blacks were not content to remain incarcerated by slavery.

Brown also discussed some details of his plan. It seems certain he spoke of alternative geographical areas into which

his select force might strike. He shrugged off assertions that his cadre was too small by saying that the scheme depended on surprise and not numbers. The warrior praised the "highly moral" men he had recruited and hinted that he hoped to obtain the services of Canadian blacks. Brown boasted of the rigorous training his men had undergone in preparation for their "dash" South and displayed the constitution he had drawn up to govern his mountain fortress community. The warrior concluded his remarks by suggesting that even if the proposed insurrection lasted only one day the whole country from the Potomac to Savannah would be "ablaze." No doubt, Brown's Boston confederates also realized they would have a noble martyr to abolition if the escapade failed. Wouldn't Brown positively personalize the antislavery issue as fully as Edward Loring had negatively personalized it? And as Sanborn had so aptly suggested, they all felt they were faced with the question of "dissertation, betrayal or support." Even though they had doubts, Brown had to be assisted.<sup>20</sup>

By the time Brown had finished presenting the plan on March 8, four days after his arrival, the five Massachusetts abolitionists hesitantly decided to join with Gerrit Smith to raise funds for his efforts. They formed the Secret Committee of Six, made Stearns chairman, Sanborn secretary, and began collecting 1000 dollars for Brown's "business operations." The five from Massachusetts were to raise at least

100 dollars a piece and more if they could. Brown would be sure of at least 500 dollars and 1000 dollars "in all probability." While Dr. George Cabot and T. R. Russell were given vague hints of the "speculation," the committeemen resolved that no other member of the abolitionist community should be "admitted to a share of the business." Brown himself continually cautioned them about the absolute necessity of secrecy and during the meetings even vetoed Sanborn's suggestion that Wendell Phillips be brought into the "operation." According to Brown, Phillips was not a "man of action" and therefore should not have knowledge of the venture.<sup>21</sup>

Between March 8 and March 17, Sanborn pressed his colleagues to raise the money they had pledged. On March 18 he called a meeting of the group at Howe's place to coordinate their labors. At this meeting Stearns was made treasurer and took control of approximately 150 dollars which had already been raised. It was decided that since Sanborn and Higginson were "less able to raise money" than the others they should be limited to a 100 dollar contribution. Stearns, Howe, and Parker should raise that sum and more if possible. Stearns promised to raise an additional 200 dollars, Parker also claimed he "would do more," and Howe hoped to raise at least 50 dollars beyond the required sum. Sanborn was pleased with the efforts that were being made. Sometime after the meeting he wrote Brown a letter and advised the warrior that the enterprise still looked "hopeful" to "speculative people."

By April 1, 375 dollars of the minimum pledge had been raised.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the formation of a secret committee to assist Brown and the collection of funds to finance the raid, the Boston members of the group felt much like Sanborn did when he first heard the plan at Peterboro. They remained only "half convinced" that they should support the scheme. They were reluctant conspirators. Only gradually in the weeks following Brown's revelations were their doubts abated by Parker's theorizations. There were good reasons for their apprehension. All of them wondered about the venture's chances of success given the "slender means" Brown sought. The plan seemed well conceived and organized but a number of unanswered questions still remained. Brown never did say how many men could be counted on to join him in the initial foray. At Smith's, Brown had "casually asked" Sanborn what he thought of a strike on the federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry. But at Peterboro, and again in Boston, Harpers Ferry was only mentioned as one of a number of places where the raid could be started. By the time Brown left Boston the group had no idea which place he favored. Brown said he expected Canadian and free northern blacks to join him in his Virginia mountain fortress yet never suggested whether leaders of the black community had begun to recruit volunteers or whether he was depending on a spontaneous reaction like the one he expected from southern slaves. Sanborn's euphemistic

vagueness in his communications with Brown and other members of the secret committee (the secretary always referred to the raid as a "business operation," "speculation" or the "wool business") was prompted as much by the demands of secrecy as by a lack of precise information and specific detail about the scheme.<sup>23</sup>

Then, too, despite the fact that each of these men trusted Brown and may even have revered his character, all of them were forced to confront two personal convictions which struck at the heart of Brown's scheme and raised strong doubt about its chances for success. All of the committee members (excluding Higginson) had ambivalent feelings about subsidizing a violent, offensive thrust at slavery. Even Kansas aid had always been for defense against the Missouri "ruffians." Now Brown wanted to begin an insurrection. Everyone except Higginson had felt relieved by the successful political solution to the Kansas struggle, now they were being asked to finally and firmly reject a political settlement on the question of slavery. In effect, each member of the committee was being asked to incite a Faneuil Hall crowd and send it storming into Court Square. And each of the members faced that request with the same ambivalence that Parker and Howe felt four years earlier.

In addition to Brown's unanswered questions and their own ambivalence about using violence as an offensive weapon against slavery, all of the committee members including



Higginson had tremendous doubts about the central premise on which Brown's insurrectionary thrust rested: the willingness of blacks to fight for their freedom. All of the reluctant conspirators were imbued with a romantic racialist image of the black man's nature and did not believe he was capable of fighting his white oppressors. As recently as January, in a speech called the "Present Aspect of Slavery," Theodore Parker perfectly explicated their racial sentiment. Indeed, Parker fully accepted the racial stereotype adhered to by the defenders of slavery. But Parker claimed that far from marking the black race for slavery, such traits indicated that the black man had achieved an advanced form of Christian piety and should therefore be a free member of society. Parker spoke almost reverently of the African as the "most docile and pliant of all races of man." He almost applauded the fact that the black man had "little ferocity." Vengeance which was "instantial" with the Anglo-Saxon (as well as being the ultimate source of his freedom) was "exceptional" in the black man's history. Even in their "barbarous state" Africans had never been "addicted" to revenge. In fact, the black man was "always prone to mercy." He was strong in the "affectional instinct," "easy," and "indolent." Unlike his Anglo-Saxon brothers who owed their freedom to their ability to fight for it, the black man was "little warlike." Brown asked for far more than money from members of the committee. He sought their trust without fully revealing his plan, he

asked them to surmount their apprehension about using violence, and, above all, asked them to accept views of the black man that did not square with their own conceptions of his nature. It is no wonder that in the first days after Brown left Boston the committee members remained only "half convinced" about supporting the "dash" at slavery. As Parker noted sometime later, they simply weren't sure that Brown's plan was the "right way" of getting at slavery.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, Parker's misgivings were the greatest among the committee membership. And this is exemplified by the minister's reaction to a request Brown made of him before leaving Boston. The Kansas warrior asked Parker to write two addresses for his use during the invasion. One was to be sent to the "officers and Soldiers of the United States army on the Duty of a Soldier." In it, Brown hoped Parker would "powerfully assert" the conviction that a soldier's duty (if he understood what was morally right) "was to desert the army and join up with Ossawatimie Brown." The second address was to be used by Brown to inspire his insurrectionary forces. And his request for it is an interesting projection of the way in which the warrior cultivated the confidence of potential allies. Brown stipulated that the second speech must be short so as to be read and must be written in the "simplest and plainest language." The address must not have "the least affection of a scholar about it." Yet it should be constructed with "great clearness and power." The whole tone of the

speech, like Brown's tone with his conspirational associates, must demonstrate that he was "'after other' and not 'after himself, at all, at all'." Parker should also bear in mind that "women were susceptible of being carried away by the kindness of an intrepid and magnanimous soldier even when his brave name was but a terror the day before."<sup>25</sup>

Parker refused Brown's request. Instead, he sent Brown a copy of General McClellan's "Report on the Armies of Europe." The refusal indicates Parker's initial uncertainty about Brown's plan. The minister like the rest of his colleagues (except Higginson) had begun to collect funds for Brown but had not really resolved qualms about conspiring to subsidize the raid. His trust in Brown's character and values carried him a long way but his skepticism about violence and a black response prevented his entire commitment to the project. Yes, he would raise funds for an attack he wasn't even sure would take place but he would not write speeches that were premised on the fact that such an insurrectionary thrust had already been made. Subsidizing theory was one thing writing speeches for the actuality quite another.<sup>26</sup>

Yet even though Parker's tentative initial commitment to Brown rested on a faith in the warrior's character, as weeks passed he gave serious attention to Brown's contention about the slave's willingness to fight. Slowly that theoretical commitment strengthened. Slowly Parker began to dispel his anxiety about the capability of blacks to exhibit "vengeful

emotions." Perhaps Brown was correct. Perhaps it was necessary (and possible) that black men fight for freedom. Brown's assertions forced Parker to reflect on facts which seemed to buttress the warrior's claims.

In early February, 1856, Parker had been considerably impressed by the courage and initiative of Anthony Burns. After spending two years in slavery, following rendition, the fugitive's freedom had been purchased by leading black and white abolitionists of Massachusetts. When Burns returned to Boston to express his gratitude he spoke of his future plans. The ex-slave claimed that he eventually wanted to work "in the South" as a minister. He realized many black men didn't wish to go back there once freed from slavery but said he felt compelled to do so in order to help his people "out of bondage." Burns' courageous stand seems to have prompted Parker to make inquiries of William Wells, a leading black literary figure and historian residing in Boston, about black contributions to the American revolutionary effort. According to Wells these contributions had been substantial. Wells' contentions inspired Parker to write the historian George Bancroft and ask that more attention be given to the valiant role played by blacks at Bunker Hill.<sup>27</sup>

When Parker linked the memory of Burns' statements with Wells' assertions and efforts of Boston blacks to free the fugitive slave Shadrach in 1852, Brown's contentions about the black man's willingness to fight for his own freedom

helped stimulate some new theorizations. In early April of 1858, Parker asserted that it was time for a re-assessment of white "out-door charity." Parker was now convinced that seventy percent of these charitable efforts had only a "reflex good action." That is, only thirty percent of white charitable activity actually helped the intended "receiver." Most of the time it was the "giver" who benefited himself with a sense of "his own righteousness." Parker believed it was necessary to "reverse" these percentages. The best way to do this (as Brown intended) was to make efforts which were geared toward helping people help themselves. Parker's assertions about "out door charity" on the heels of Brown's revelations say a good deal about the growing impact of the warrior's statements. After first being met with unspoken skepticism, Brown's words forced Parker to re-evaluate the effects of white reform efforts. Parker now conceded that such efforts were "mainly bad" and did "more harm than good." The Unitarian minister even formulated a new law. He hypothesized that "charitable demand" was often "equivalent to the organization to meet that demand." When organized "dependence" became "institutionalized" both giving and receiving were simultaneously bureaucratized. In the name of perfecting society reformers might be inadvertantly thwarting the one thing that could bring about such perfection: the individual's own effort for perfection. No one could have made this clearer to Parker than the highly disciplined,

self-controlled, autonomous, Kansas warrior, named John Brown. If Parker dared carry his new theories to their logical extreme (and the minister seems to have done just that), he must have begun to suspect the highly organized and institutionalized efforts of abolitionism. Maybe such efforts weren't helping blacks. Perhaps, as Brown contended, such efforts only provided white antislavery advocates with a sense of their own "righteousness." Perhaps Brown was correct when he suggested that only black self-help could be effective. Parker's slowly developing enthusiasm for a venture he initially listened to with serious doubts is at least partially attributable to this reasoning. It counterbalanced Brown's lack of specific detail about the venture, as well as, the minister's ambivalence to violence and his romantic racialist prejudice.<sup>28</sup>

There was also another reason why Parker gradually embraced Brown's plan. A "revival of religion" was taking place in Massachusetts and throughout the country that spring. But the radical Unitarian minister was not at all pleased. He felt it was a "false revival" especially when ministers in the Boston area attributed it to "prayer." To Parker it wasn't "prayer" that brought religious reawakening but "effectual fervant work" for the right. The "head-work" and "hand-work" of "a righteous man." Simply gossiping before bedtime, "tattling mere words," and then asking God to do one's own duty was not true religious revival. Uncertain

as Parker may have been about Brown's plan, the minister could not overlook the fact that in "Ossawatimie Brown" religion had an "effectual" and "fervant" worker. Brown wanted action not mere words. He not only spoke for the right but demanded that black slaves cease praying for salvation and start striking for it with their own hands. In addition, Parker viewed Brown as more than a righteous man. In his own way, the man from North Elba was an intensely dedicated and emotional minister of the gospel and Parker had always contended that it was a minister's duty "to awaken, strengthen and quicken the religious power" of men. It was the minister's duty to "diffuse ideas" which "molded society" so that it could develop well under the direction of men of great "natural powers." Wasn't this precisely what Brown wanted to accomplish by his insurrectionary efforts? The warrior hoped to change white views of the black man and thereby remold white attitudes toward the institution of slavery. At the same time, he was asking slaves to assert their manhood. Could there be a more competent "minister" to "diffuse" the proper ideas and values to both black and white society? Weren't Brown's values precisely those which Parker and his colleagues hoped to impart to their fellow Americans? Higginson felt there was something much more "real" about Kansas settlers than there was in the rest of the "diseased" American society. Wasn't Brown a "real" American, who embodied the ideals of Bunker Hill? Couldn't Brown bring the

proper values to black men--maybe even impart the "vengeful" emotions so necessary for freedom?<sup>29</sup>

Parker's speculations calmed the fears of the "half convinced" Sanborn and his Kansas committee sponsor, George Luther Stearns. Each of these men shared Parker's ambivalence toward violence and his doubts about black capabilities. In addition, they still wondered if they had heard the last from Hugh Forbes, they wondered if the convulsion Brown hoped to induce could be controlled, and they pondered their responsibility if the warrior was caught. In the face of these and other doubts, Parker's theorizations were reassuring.

Samuel Gridley Howe was particularly influenced by his good friend's notions. Parker's views resonated his own theory of diffusion. When he thought about it, Howe realized that he and Stearns had actually made a similar case for self-help in their discussions about the handicapped. If it was important for the handicapped to be exposed to "normal" people, wasn't it just as important that the black men, handicapped by the institution of slavery, also have that opportunity. Could blacks be exposed to a better man than Brown? Howe also conjured up a four-year-old memory as he debated the necessity of black violence. He could still hear the shouts of a young black woman as she watched Anthony Burns being taken back to slavery. He should "kill himself" she cried as Burns walked by, "kill himself" rather than be taken



back into slavery. At that time Howe had realized that this ultimate gesture of self-sacrifice was really the only thing which would disabuse white America of the notion that blacks were suited for slavery. Perhaps Brown was correct, perhaps a fight to the death for freedom was the only way for the black man to demonstrate his manhood and hatred for slavery. Wasn't the willingness to fight to the death for freedom the central racial trait of the Anglo-Saxon? Didn't the black man have to adopt the trait in order to demonstrate his right to freedom?<sup>30</sup>

Parker's thoughts on "out-door" charity also caused Howe some guilt. His own trip to Kansas had been an effort to do more for the "giver" than the "receiver." The excursion had been as much a way of resolving personal doubts about his character as it had been an attempt to assist Kansas settlers. It was a "last chance" to test the purity of his motives, to overcome his fear of danger, and to recapture a romanticized past. In the end, the trip only served to compound the uncertainty he felt about his character. He began to believe that if slavery was to be actively resisted it would have to be done by someone other than himself. Now, ironically, he not only had the chance to subsidize someone else's effort but also, in a somewhat less extravagant way, to recapture a sense of his own self-worth. All Brown asked was a chance to act. Howe and his committee associates grew more certain each day after Brown's departure that they could not refuse him.

## III

While Brown's Boston allies collected money to subsidize his "dash" at slavery and gradually dispersed their apprehensions about the advisability of the scheme, the Kansas warrior went to Philadelphia with John Jr. for discussions with black leaders in that city. His conversations with Rev. Stephen Smith, William Still, and the militant black minister, Henry Highland Garnet, reaffirmed his convictions about the willingness of free northern blacks to assist the plan. Brown left Philadelphia full of confidence. He then traveled to North Elba and recruited the services of his sons Henry, Watson, and Oliver before quickly moving on to Syracuse. There he visited black minister James Loguen who suggested he seek the assistance of famed underground railroader Harriet Tubman. Brown sought the black woman out in St. Catherines, Ontario but she made no commitments to his venture although she suggested he might obtain assistance from Martin R. Delany the black nationalist who was living in Chatham, Ontario. Indeed, Delany was helpful. He suggested they set up a convention in early May where Brown might outline his plan to radical abolitionists residing in Ontario. Hopefully Brown could also recruit interested parties. After a trip to Springdale, Iowa to advise his Kansas recruits of the state of his plans, Brown returned to Chatham, May 8, and prepared for the convention. Everything seemed to be proceeding

smoothly. Brown had the financial backing of the Secret Six, the approval and support of militant black leaders, and an opportunity to recruit more men for his "dash" at Chatham.<sup>31</sup>

## CHAPTER VI

As John Brown prepared for the Chatham meeting, new outbursts by Hugh Forbes shattered the confidence of the Secret Six and forced postponement of the raid. Once again Forbes lashed out at the New England "humanitarians" ("especially" Sanborn) for their negligent treatment. This time he made it clear that he would refuse to allow Brown's "speculation" to "go on." The letters Forbes wrote to Howe and Sanborn did not indicate the soldier knew of the secret committee but did suggest he had greater knowledge of the scheme than Brown had led the group to believe during the March meetings. Sanborn had hoped to attend the Chatham convention and bring Brown 600 dollars. Now, in the wake of the Forbes ultimatum, there was no chance of traveling to Canada. The committee had to act swiftly to prevent Forbes from "giving statistics" and "quoting prices" to newspapers while they were "trying to start a march on buyers and sellers."<sup>1</sup>

And act they did. On May 5 Sanborn, Stearns, Parker, and Howe met to consider their proper course. A careful reexamination of the contents of Forbes' letters indicated that the soldier knew "details of the plan" and also knew that Stearns, Howe, and Sanborn were "informed" about it. Parker and Stearns were quick to react. They decided the plan had to be "deferred." Sanborn claimed to be "in doubt"

though "inclining to their opinion." Only Howe balked. He wasn't at all sure postponement was necessary but could not persuade his fellow conspirators to change their view and ultimately acquiesced in their decision. In addition to this temporary withdrawal of support, it was also decided that Stearns should go to Chatham and speak to Brown. In the meantime, Sanborn was to write to Gerrit Smith informing him of the situation and asking his assistance in explaining the secret committee's action to the Kansas warrior. It was hoped that Smith would also go to Chatham to discuss the Forbes' threats and to help re-evaluate the project.<sup>2</sup>

Two days after the meeting Sanborn received another letter from Forbes in which the soldier of fortune indicated that he would stop at nothing to destroy Brown's effort. After reading the letter Sanborn no longer "inclined" to postponement but clung to it in panic-stricken desperation. The committee secretary immediately wrote to Higginson saying that Forbes had "exact knowledge" of the secret project, that there was "a leak" somewhere in the secret committee's boat, and that since everything was so "uncertain" the plan was best terminated "for the present." Before they did anything, the secret committee must "get rid" of Forbes. He had a "grudge" against all of them. Sanborn also openly questioned the competence of John Brown, the source and symbol of his "place" in Massachusetts abolitionism. After asking Higginson to make discreet inquiries about Forbes and

requesting the minister to go to Canada and discuss matters with Brown (Stearns now claimed he was unable to do it), Sanborn flared angrily at his erstwhile warrior patron. The secretary told Higginson that he fully realized news of postponement would be "hard" for his "old friend" but suggested that the delay was entirely Brown's fault. The warrior's "too great confidence in Forbes" had forced such a decision "upon the speculators." Sanborn had been a bit upset by Brown's "imperiousness" during the North Elba subscription effort, was occasionally disappointed when he didn't receive news of Brown's whereabouts, and was annoyed by the "abusive" letters Forbes wrote in January but he was never tempted to quit Brown's side. Now, however, even as Parker's theorizations nourished his own and the others confidence in the advisability of the scheme, Forbes' behavior created very serious doubts about the wisdom of supporting "Ossawatimie Brown."<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Wentworth Higginson was the only member of the Secret Six who would not be stampeded into postponement. Higginson was irate when Sanborn notified him about deferral. He was determined not to go to Canada to appease Brown. He rejected the committee's decision outright and immediately wrote to the Kansas warrior stating his position. The Worcester activist was absolutely "against postponement." If the plan was postponed, it was "postponed forever." After all, couldn't Hugh Forbes "do as much harm this year as

next?" Higginson believed everything had gone "too far"--hesitating at this moment meant "certain failure." When Theodore Parker tried to placate his protégé by suggesting that if Higginson "knew the extent" of "Forbes' knowledge" he would "not council" continuation, the activist refused to listen.<sup>4</sup>

Nor was Higginson the only member of the secret group who had to be sold on postponement. Parker also found it necessary to convince Howe of the propriety of the May 5 decision. Howe certainly "knew the extent" of Forbes threats, since he had received one of the soldier's letters. And initially the physician flew into a "tempestuous rage" over the matter. He was particularly angered by Forbes' vague effort to inform Henry Wilson, Charles Sumner, and William Seward of Massachusetts' plans "to overthrow slavery at the South." But Howe had not panicked like his colleagues and still hoped to continue the project after Stearns, Parker, and Sanborn settled on deferral. Instead of abandoning Brown, Howe felt it would be possible to confuse and divert Forbes. He fired off a "blistering" note to the soldier of fortune claiming his accusations were based on "utter fallacy." Howe said it was "absurd" for Forbes to infer that the committee's (Massachusetts Kansas) relationship with Brown invested them with "any responsibility for his acts." As far as the doctor knew there was no legal or moral contractual arrangement between the two soldiers. Even if Brown

had entered into an agreement, the committee "never delegated power to anyone to bind it by legal and moral obligation." Howe hoped to "dissolve" Forbes of any "lingering notion" that he or "any members" of the "late committee" had "any responsibility for Captain Brown's actions." Howe falsely suggested that in the "last communication" sent to Brown the committee had urged him to go "at once" to Kansas and assist in the coming elections. In his letter Howe also made a great effort to keep Forbes from any further meetings with Charles Sumner who was still suffering emotionally and physically from his beating on the Senate floor two years earlier. Howe told Forbes that he had personally notified Sumner of Brown's "integrity" and "ability." And the doctor asserted that any future attempt by Forbes to convince Sumner of negligence by his Boston friends would be wasted.<sup>5</sup>

A few days after Howe wrote Forbes, he also sought to "dissolve" the suspicions of Henry Wilson. Forbes had approached the junior Senator from Massachusetts with vague references to Brown's plan and accusations about possible misuse of Massachusetts Kansas Committee funds. Wilson was shocked and immediately contacted Howe hoping to determine the truth about the soldier's statements. Wilson was afraid that if Forbes' revelations were true and were made public they would jeopardize the Republican Party's election chances in the fall. Wilson demanded to know what was going on in Massachusetts. Howe was quick to reply. He assured Wilson



that the Massachusetts Kansas Committee had given "no countenance" to Brown for "any operations outside of Kansas." Measures had been taken "to prevent any such monstrous perversion of a kind as would be the application of means raised for the defense of Kansas to a purpose which the subscribers to this fund would disapprove and vehemently condemn." Technically, Howe was being "truthful" with Wilson. Forbes did not realize Brown's subsidization had been taken over from the Kansas Committee by the Secret Committee of Six. Also, in the days immediately following the May 5 conference, possession of the guns originally donated to Brown by the Massachusetts Kansas Committee and later reconfirmed in his possession by the Secret Six had been transferred back to George Luther Stearns whose personal funds had paid for them in the first place. Bureaucratic subterfuge allowed Howe to "truthfully" tell Wilson that the Massachusetts Kansas Committee had not "countenanced" the plans Forbes alluded to in his statements. But the Boston physician had stretched the limits of truth considerably. And he well knew it.<sup>6</sup>

While Howe diverted Forbes and Wilson, Sanborn again tried to bring Higginson into line with the views of the other secret committee members. He notified Higginson that even Gerrit Smith agreed that postponement was the wisest policy. The secretary also claimed that he could not "quite yield" to Higginson's arguments because Forbes had it "in his power" to remove "the terror" of Brown's proposed

insurrectionary thrust. Wasn't the element of surprise the most essential feature in the plan Brown outlined during March? There was no doubt in Sanborn's mind about deferral and the necessity of putting Forbes "off the track." Sanborn further rationalized his attitude near the end of his letter to Higginson by claiming that even if he agreed with Higginson nothing could be done to change the May 5 decision because the largest "stockholders" in the venture (Stearns, Smith, and Parker) were adamantly opposed to any movement by Brown and would not raise money to support the warrior. Since there was "little the rest of us can do . . . in that way," Sanborn felt he must abide by the decision.<sup>7</sup>

Higginson was cynically amused by the temerity of his fellow conspirators and particularly angered by Sanborn's new found obsequiousness. As secretary of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, Sanborn never hesitated to wield the authority of his office in Brown's behalf. Whether he was badgering Higginson for Worcester funds or soliciting Stearns generosity during the North Elba subscription drive, Sanborn had always been aggressive and calculating; never cowed by his own lack of financial resources. Now, however, in the face of possible exposure by Forbes, he had become uncharacteristically submissive to the major "stockholders." As Higginson reread Sanborn's letter he was also struck by the secretary's use of the word "terror." For an individual who only knew of violence in a theoretical way and who, along

with the other secret committee members, had steadfastly avoided personal contact with violence, terror was an unknown commodity, a mere abstraction justified by another abstraction known as Higher Law. For Sanborn and the others, violence was a topic to be discussed in lecture rooms, the gracious confines of the Bird Club, and in front of an abolitionist gathering. Violence only had practical use to them as a threat to slaveholders or as a rhetorical device to stimulate and shape public opinion. As far as Higginson was concerned, Sanborn, Parker, Stearns, Smith, and Howe would never confront the reality of force, never take responsibility for subsidizing it. Higginson suspected that something more than Forbes' disclosures held his colleagues back, a greater fear gripped these men than concern about exposure. Even though they had committed themselves to Brown early that spring they were all ambivalent about the use of violent means and continued to look for a reason not to follow through with support for the Kansas warrior. Forbes' revelations provided them with the perfect opportunity to swap abstractions. They traded the principle of justifiable violence for that of self-interest. They relieved their own doubts and fears. Higginson was furious.

George Luther Stearns also worked to order the chaos unleashed by Forbes. He also sought to throw people "off the track." He warned Brown to hold on to the rifles and side-arms he had been given pending further directions from the

committee. In a few days a member of the secret group would arrive at Chatham to discuss the "best mode" of "disposing" of the weapons.<sup>8</sup>

The letters Brown received from his Boston "friends" telling of Forbes' destructive efforts and suggesting postponement of the raid punctuated an already disappointing convention. Harriet Tubman failed to appear, fewer men than Brown expected showed up to discuss the plan, and some who came expressed the opinion that the Kansas warrior would be "disappointed in the slaves because they did not know sufficient to rally to his support." By the end of the Chatham meeting he had not recruited anyone to join him, was stranded in Canada without sufficient funds to pay his hotel bill, and seemed to have lost all credibility with a majority of the secret committee's membership. In desperation, Brown again turned to his son John Jr. and asked if he would "think over" the matter. Like so many other times when his ventures were on the brink of failure, Brown hoped his eldest son could shed "light on the subject." Brown knew he had to act quickly. He must regain control of the situation or face the possibility of complete loss of support by the Secret Committee of Six.<sup>9</sup>

Calming himself, the Kansas warrior took the first step toward reclaiming the confidence of his "stockholders" by writing to the one man who stood firmly against postponement, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. The letter Brown wrote at this

critical juncture in the conspiracy is quite revealing. It tells as much about the image he hoped to promote as his letter to young Henry Stearns. Brown made no appeals to the justice of his cause, no allusions to his providential instrumentality, no use of Biblical quotation or inflated antislavery rhetoric. Rather, he labored to reestablish his image as a pragmatic, self-controlled and calculating "leader of men." He told Higginson that it was "invariable" with him to be "governed by circumstances." He would "not do anything" while he did "not know what to do." None of his Boston friends "need have any fears" about "hasty or rash steps being taken." Only "knowledge" was "power." Brown assured Higginson that arrangements had been made to quiet Forbes, asked for funds to pay his Chatham bills, and concluded his letter with the pledge that he would "not . . . act other than to secure perfect knowledge of the facts in regard to what Forbes had already done." The course to be taken in both Chatham and Boston should not be decided "under excitement."<sup>10</sup>

Brown also wrote to George Luther Stearns. Covering much of the same ground with the Medford businessman that he had with Higginson, Brown closed his note with the injunction he would live by: "In all ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." But Stearns was not as deeply affected by such biblical flourishes as he once had been. Despite these calm assurances the businessman was too upset with Brown to

be impressed by religious incantations. He wanted to know why Forbes was acting so irrationally, how much Forbes knew of the plan, why Brown had been so indiscriminate in trusting such an erratic character, and what the true nature of Brown's arrangement had been with the disgruntled soldier? Most important, Stearns like Sanborn, Parker, and Smith had lost confidence in Brown. In March, Stearns believed Brown's version of the agreement; at the moment he was unsure of what to believe. The businessman's slowly developing willingness to have faith in black capabilities and to repress his fear of violence was shattered by Brown's indiscretion. Could Brown really lead a successful raid on slavery when he couldn't even govern the behavior of a former military associate? Shortly after receiving Brown's letter Stearns wrote to Higginson, notified him that Brown had been relieved of the arms in his custody, invited the Worcester activist to Boston in order to discuss postponement, and coldly advised the recalcitrant committee member that if he would only listen "we can convince you it [postponement] is for the best." Brown's religious injunction hadn't made a dent in the lead-pipe manufacturers' conviction to temporarily withhold support from the scheme.<sup>11</sup>

In the week between receiving Brown's letter of May 15 and Stearns' request that he come to Boston to be "convinced" on May 21, Higginson continued his vigorous effort to salvage the raid. On May 18, he wrote Parker and again warned that

"postponement was abandonment." Forbes "could do as much harm next year." He firmly believed threats of exposure could only be countered by swift action. There was still time to capitalize on the element of surprise, still time to "steal a march." He had "little doubt" that a successful effort could be made. Any "betrayal afterwards" would "only increase the panic" caused by the raid. To Sanborn's contention that Forbes could "injure the operation" by exposing the "smallness of its resources," Higginson made a most revealing rebuttal; one that indicates much about the nature of the plan unfolded by Brown in early March. Higginson told Parker that Sanborn had forgotten that by Brown's "original program" the raid "was to be regarded (at first) as a mere local flurry with no resources at all." From the beginning Brown argued that the small size of his group would act as a perfect camouflage to the ultimate design of general insurrection and Higginson was "amazed" his fellow conspirators hadn't considered this before making their decision.<sup>12</sup>

Higginson fought hard for Brown's plan on other grounds as well. In the last weeks of April and the first weeks of May, Higginson became thoroughly convinced in the necessity of black violence. The minister gave testimony to that belief and at the same time prodded his secret committee associates in a May 12 speech before the New York Antislavery Society. Echoing ideas quite similar to Parker's notions about "out door" charity, Higginson stated that "white

Anglo-Saxon abolitionists" were "too apt to assume the whole work" of ending slavery and tended to "ignore the great force of the victims of tyranny." If black slaves were "ever to free themselves," they "must strike the first blow." For many years he had been "disposed to think" that the "salvation of the slave" had to be worked out "not by him but for him." Presently, he had begun to "see otherwise." Higginson admitted to wondering at the "patience of the Negro" but was confident that the time would come when seeing the "aroused strength" of the African, whites would "at last give him credit for the prudence which was waited until these preliminary agitations [Kansas, Fugitive Slave Law] . . . created the sympathy . . . needed for his support." Abolitionists often spoke of the African as "weak, down-trodden, degraded," and "cowardly because exposed to the institution of slavery." But in so doing, Higginson realized that abolitionists might have been perpetuating the institution by failing to see that "behind all those years of cheerful submission . . . there may be a dagger and power to use it when the time comes." The African had been degraded by the institution of slavery but it was time all Americans saw what he had once been and what he "may be again." Ironically, Higginson made his claims for the black man partially on the basis of his own romantic racialist notions about the origins of race traits. In the end, he based his confidence in black capabilities on the fact that they had received blood from "heroic races,"



the Maroons of Surinam and Jamaica, and these races had "mingled blood" with "a race [Anglo-Saxon] which was the strongest in the world." Higginson also saw significant indications of black willingness to fight for freedom. Fugitive slaves demonstrated the black man's desire for freedom and the Shadrach Rescue executed by Boston blacks was a prime example of northern freeman's regard for his chained brethren. Then too, as Brown noted in early March, the underground railroad had "lodged tens of thousands in Canada" and these black men and women "proved the possibility of African civilization and African agriculture." As Howe might have suggested, Higginson believed that blacks had "learned their strength" in Canada by being exposed to "normal people" and they were now ready to use that strength in the cause of liberty.<sup>13</sup>

On May 18, the same day that Higginson sent his letter of protest to Parker, Sanborn wrote and told the Worcester committeeman of Howe's efforts to "baffle" Forbes, Wilson, and "God knows how many more" who had heard about the plan. The secretary also informed Higginson that a committee meeting had been called for May 24 in order to formally re-evaluate support of Brown. Gerrit Smith promised to attend since he had to be in town for an American Peace Society meeting.<sup>14</sup>

## II

Reeling from his brother's recent death as well as the disclosures by Forbes, Gerrit Smith came to Boston in late May to speak before the American Peace Society. It is possible that when Smith wrote his speech he was laboring under the emotional burden of these two events. In any case, his words to the society on the morning of May 24, are another example of his "paradoxical intellect" at work. The address contained "two separate arguments" about the use of force. In one Smith spoke against a nation's involvement in external war and in the other he spoke "in favor of armed force to maintain internal order." Smith believed war in the international sphere "could be avoided always" and that "no nation known to refuse to engage in it need fear it." A country's refusal to fight would "unequivocally express" the "confidence" that war would not be made on her. In addition, a nation must give "ample proof" of her "professed principles" by dismantling forts and disbanding her army. But Smith's advocacy of this position on external warfare did not make him a non-resistant (even Christ had practiced non-resistance only from "expediency") for he firmly believed that "armed force" was essential to the domestic life of a nation. There was a definite need to "suppress frontier violence" and to support the "irregular but righteous governments" set up in Kansas. Above all, domestic violence was necessary to

deliver the slave from bondage "at whatever harm to the slaveholder and to restrain slaveholders by whatever terrors it is necessary to hold over them."<sup>15</sup>

By two o'clock in the afternoon, as Smith met with other members of the secret committee in his Revere House hotel room, these theorizations about the necessity of domestic force gave way to the practical possibility of exposure by Hugh Forbes. Smith fully agreed with Sanborn, Stearns, Parker, and Howe that support should be temporarily withdrawn from Brown. The secret group also decided that the best way to diffuse Forbes' threats was to send Brown back to Kansas. Howe had already suggested as much to the soldier of fortune and Brown's actual return to Kansas might be enough to convince him that the doctor was telling the truth. In order to induce the Kansas warrior to go back to the territory and assure him that he had not been abandoned, the committee decided to promise to raise 2000 dollars for resumption of the project at a later date. The committee also decided to send Brown 500 dollars to pay his Chatham bills, to return control of the rifles to the warrior, and to request his presence in Boston for further discussion of the entire matter.<sup>16</sup>

All of the secret committee members, with the obvious exception of Higginson, were tremendously relieved by the actions they decided upon in their afternoon meeting. Surprisingly, the man who seemed to relax most was Samuel

Gridley Howe. He had not capitulated to postponement until a few days before the meeting, but when he did he was happily unburdened of the great pressure it took to stand by Brown. Writing to George Woods, Howe expressed part of the reason for his relief. The doctor claimed he could now "powerfully" and "truthfully" assert that Forbes was "all wrong" in his description of Brown's "intended movements." But it was more than just being able to speak "truthfully" which eased his mental and physical strain. Again, as in the summer of 1856, the clash between Howe's abolitionist activity and his genuine friendship for Charles Sumner had become a source of paralyzing guilt.<sup>17</sup>

Earlier in the month Howe had been forced to lie to Sumner when the ailing friend asked about the truth of statements Forbes was making in Washington that spring. The doctor claimed he was amazed Sumner didn't "see through" a man whose "hot temper" had blinded him to the wrongfulness of his course. Howe assured Sumner that the Massachusetts Kansas Committee had never "directly or indirectly employed" Forbes and that Brown's contact with the soldier had been made on his "own responsibility." What bothered Howe was a growing fear that Sumner would be drawn into the Forbes situation and be subjected to undue emotional stress. Such stress might further retard the slow recovery Sumner was making from his beating. In fact, by mid-May, Howe wasn't certain that the Senator hadn't already been affected. Writing to Sumner on

May 17, in the midst of the crises, he cautioned his friend to get plenty of "rest exercise and fresh air" and advised him to "avoid taxing his brain by keeping away from people and events" which "demand too much." Howe frankly admitted that his own "doubt" had been "painfully incurred" by Sumner's failure to improve his health and by his recent relapse. In a comment that goes a long way toward explaining why Howe finally agreed to postpone Brown's effort, the doctor stated that his doubts would have "disappeared in a sad certainty" if he could have been sure that the relapse "was not occasioned by any sufficient external cause but was a natural consequence of the internal condition of the injured organs." Howe was very concerned that the Forbes accusations had contributed to Sumner's failing health. Indeed, the very next day, May 18, Howe suggested that his old friend should resign his office and "stay away in Europe" for "a year or two."<sup>18</sup>

By the time Brown received the secret committee's request for a meeting in Boston at the end of the month, he had calmed himself and had begun working to hold his cadre of recruits in line during the period of postponement. Writing to John Kagi and other members of the group who left Chatham earlier, Brown informed them that "such has been the effect of the course taken by Forbes on our Eastern friends that I have some fears . . . we shall be compelled to delay further action for the present." The warrior told Kagi that he had

been urged to postpone but had been promised "liberal assistance after a while." Even if they did have to "defer" efforts, no problem should arise in "great and noble minds." One should never indulge in "useless complaints." It was in a "time of difficulty" that men showed what they were made of and it was at such times that "men mark themselves."<sup>19</sup>

John Brown began to "mark" himself with his "eastern friends" on May 31 in Boston when he held the first of a series of meetings in his room at the American House hotel. Once again Brown was forced to explain his relationship with Forbes. Once again Brown accused the soldier of being vain and irresponsible. But this time Brown did admit that he had not fully perceived the man's character when he first recruited him for the scheme and that Forbes knew more about the plan than Brown had previously suggested. Nevertheless, Brown still argued that Forbes did not know enough to jeopardize the project. Howe, Stearns, Parker, and Sanborn listened attentively as the warrior presented his case for continuation but like the pleas of Higginson, Brown's words did nothing to change their determination to postpone the operation. After Brown finished, the committee members began to spell out the way they felt it was best to diffuse the situation. Brown was formally notified of the committee's desire to defer his "dash" at slavery, was asked to decoy Forbes by returning to Kansas, and told that the secret committee fully intended to support his venture next spring. As a way of

demonstrating their continued commitment, they gave Brown another 500 dollars for his expenses.<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Wentworth Higginson was noticeably absent from all four days of the meetings held between Brown and the other four Massachusetts members of the committee. He continued to fume about the attitudes and actions of his fellow conspirators and felt that by disregarding their invitations to attend the meetings and thereby "boycotting" those meetings he could most effectively register his protest. However, Higginson was in Boston while the June 1 session was being held and afterwards met privately with Brown to explain his behavior. Higginson's memorandum of his conversation with Brown adds substantially to our understanding of the meetings and of the relationship the warrior had with the other committee members. Higginson noted that Brown had been "pushed to postpone until next winter or spring," had been "promised 2000 dollars to 3000 dollars" if he did so, and asked to blind Forbes by returning to Kansas. Though Brown kept actual control of the weapons committed to him in 1857, he was to legally "transfer property" so as to relieve the committee of responsibility. And in the future, the conspirators were "not to know of his plans." Higginson reported that Brown was very disappointed by the committee's decision to postpone and considered those in favor of it not to be "men of action." Brown was very critical of the committee membership. He was angry that they had been "intimidated" by

Wilson, felt Gerrit Smith to be a "timid man," and thought Stearns and Parker "did not . . . abound in courage." Brown did admire Howe for initially standing fast against postponement. He made no comment about Sanborn.<sup>21</sup>

Brown's harsh words did not offend Higginson for his own evaluation coincided with the warrior's assessment. In fact, more than at any time in their relationship, Higginson was deeply impressed with the man. He was a "sly old veteran" who carefully calculated his actions. Brown admitted to Higginson that in the meetings he had "appeared to acquiesce far more than he really did" because now more than at any other time "it was essential they did not think him reckless." Brown's behavior in the wake of the Forbes' disclosures truly "marked" him.<sup>22</sup>

Nor were the five members of the secret committee who had voted to defer aid to his project the only people to be delicately manipulated by the image of a self-controlled fighter for the right. Higginson also earned his share of Brown's attention by his steadfast refusal to postpone the venture. After their exchange on June 1, Brown was determined to pay closer attention to the Worcester activist. In ensuing weeks he corresponded with Higginson more frequently, spoke of his plans more freely, and regularly requested Higginson's views of them, hoping all the while to deepen the minister's interest in the scheme and earn a commitment of funds from the Worcester County Committee.<sup>23</sup>



After seeming to "acquiesce" far more than he actually did, Brown left Boston on June 3 and headed back to Kansas as the "decoy" that "T. P. and the S's envisioned." He refused, however, to let the committee forget their obligation to him simply because he was out of sight. Within three weeks he wrote from Kansas prodding his Boston friends to be "in earnest . . . to carry out as soon as possible," the measures he had put forward in Boston "during the early spring." Brown pushed them to begin collecting funds by claiming he wanted "no delay in the matter." Brown also continued his efforts to reestablish his image as a disciplined leader of men who had the ability to smoothly carry out his proposed "dash" against slavery. While in Kansas he had "concealed his presence," surfacing only long enough to let people know he was in the territory but not "to create any excitement." He was not in Kansas to "open a quarrel or be the first to seek revenge." Even though the Kansas situation was gradually resolving itself politically, Brown couldn't help exaggerating the possibility of new turmoil in order to sustain the interest of his readers and further highlight his own discretion. According to the warrior, freestaters lived in "constant fear" of "new troubles" and they felt the whole Kansas problem would start "afresh."<sup>24</sup>

In addition to these efforts to pressure the Secret Six and refurbish his image with them, Brown also seems to have enlisted the aid of James Repath, the frenetic young

journalist who had journeyed into Kansas with Higginson. While no specific documentation exists to suggest that the two men entered into an agreement, a number of facts point to that conclusion. For one thing, Repath enjoyed the full confidence of the only man on the committee who stood by Brown during the Forbes affair, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Certainly Higginson could use help in pressing Brown's cause. For another, Repath had even more impressive credentials than Brown when it came to assessing the black man's willingness to fight for his freedom. The young journalist had traveled extensively in the South with the expressed purpose of finding out whether or not blacks were primed for insurrection. Indeed, before Repath went south he claimed that if blacks weren't ready for violence he would "disseminate discontentment" and prepare the way for "revolution." Here was a man with first-hand knowledge of all that Brown claimed for the blacks. It is hardly possible that the "sly old veteran" would miss the opportunity to put a primary source in the hands of Harvard scholars. And there is an even greater reason to believe Brown recruited Repath to promote his scheme among the reluctant conspirators in Boston. Repath was as convinced as Brown was that the only way slavery could be ended was by black insurrection. Soon after a meeting with Brown on June 27, in Kansas, Repath started east. For the next year he would press for the implementation of Brown's scheme while residing in Medford, Massachusetts and

preparing a manuscript for publication entitled The Roving Editor: or Talks with Slaves in the Southern States. An analysis of this work, which was eventually published in November of 1859 and dedicated to Brown, reveals a good deal about what Repath told Brown's Massachusetts supporters.<sup>25</sup>

In this work Repath claimed to agree with Brown in doubting the "efficacy of political antislavery action." It was founded on "expediency" and "the morals of the counting room" therefore it could do nothing to solve the black man's problems. Like Brown, Repath urged friends of the slave to "incite insurrection and encourage in the North a spirit which shall culminate in civil and servile wars." If, after all, the founding fathers had been justified in "their rebellion, how much more will the slaves be justified in "their insurrection." Repath also asserted that, like Brown, he was ready to "slay every man who attempted to resist the liberation of the slave" and was willing like Brown "to recognize the negro as brother however inferior in intelligence and actual endowments, as having rights which to take away or withhold is a crime that should be punished without mercy."<sup>26</sup>

Repath's book contained both his own reflections on the slave's condition and those of other informed observers. Samuel Gridley Howe contributed a piece on a slave prison in New Orleans. One of the centerpieces of the book, which the journalist obviously felt went a long way toward documenting his contentions about slave desires to fight for liberation,

is a section called "The Insurrection Hero." Here Repath quoted long passages of a story written by John Vaughn which studied the motivations of a black slave leader named Issac who actually led an abortive insurrection in the South. According to Vaughn, Issac was "kind, affectionate, and simple as a woman" and "never tired of doing for others." Yet he had determined that insurrection was the only hope for freeing his people. Issac's own rationale for this position was included in Vaughn's account. The slave claimed he "knew there was and could be no help for me, for my wife or my children, for my race, except we were free, and as whites would not let this be so and as God told me he could only help those who helped themselves, I preached freedom to the slaves and bid them strike for it like men." Whether Vaughn's piece was true or fictionalized is really not significant. What is important is Issac's rationale. It suggests what both Brown and Repath had been saying all along: black men knew they must fight for their own freedom.<sup>27</sup>

Repath's belief in the possibility of a spontaneous insurrection ignited by an attack like the one Brown contemplated is also contained in a section he personally wrote for the book entitled "The Underground Telegraph." According to Repath blacks would rally to the banner of those leading an insurrection because of the existence of a rapid and efficient system of communication among slaves which could effectively disperse the first news of a raid over a wide area of

the South long before slaveholders could hear of the attack and organize forces to subdue it. Repath claimed that this elaborate "underground" telegraph had begun as a "system of secret travel" among slaves and then had grown up into a communication network initially because of the slave's "love of gossip" and later, because of his "yearning for freedom." The journalist claimed that this system linked hundreds of plantations and there was no doubt in his mind that its existence gave "power" to stir a "formidable insurrection . . . directed by white men."<sup>28</sup>

There is no doubt that all the Massachusetts secret committee members who heard Repath's descriptions were skeptical. All of them had studied slaves and slavery and had not discovered such a system. Yet it seems likely that they continued to listen to him throughout the year, for none of these men had the substantial first-hand experience that the journalist claimed. It was becoming more and more difficult to refute the growing evidence which seemed to indicate a burgeoning black yearning for freedom and the willingness to fight for it.

### III

But in the first few weeks after Brown left Boston neither his pressure tactics, Repath's appearance, or the justice of black liberation concerned Stearns, Sanborn, and Smith. They were all too relieved at having narrowly escaped

exposure by Forbes. George Luther Stearns eased himself back into a belief in the political dissolution of slavery. He was cheered by the continually improving condition of Kansas and claimed to agree with E. E. Whitman that if freestaters were "moderately diligent" they would thwart the Slave Power and send the institution to "political perdition." While Brown was in Kansas acting as a decoy, struggling to recapture the confidence of supporters, and suffering with the ague, Stearns did little fund collecting for the warrior's "wool business." Instead, he began remodeling his Medford mansion, followed the Lincoln-Douglas debates, plotted the course of Donati's comet and argued against those who believed the superstition that "all great comets have been closely followed by devastating wars."<sup>29</sup>

Brown's "recklessness" in the Forbes affair petrified Sanborn. All along his commitment to the forceful dissolution of slavery had been based essentially on his attachment to Brown. In spite of Parker's theorizations about the necessity of black self-help, the secretary found that once his confidence in Brown was shaken he had great difficulty in defending the proposed raid to himself or others. Throughout the summer and fall of 1858 he cautiously modified his support for the insurrection. After all, if Brown bungled the raid as badly as he did his relationship with Forbes it was quite possible the entire membership of the secret committee would be faced with a lot more than "abusive" letters or the

wrist-slapping criticism of people like Henry Wilson. "Treason" had not yet become "patriotism" as Sanborn suggested to Higginson weeks earlier. A jail term still waited for anyone convicted as an accessory to Brown's scheme. And the thought of going to prison horrified the ex-schoolmaster. Sanborn's reflections on Kansas partially indicate his growing willingness to see slavery removed by other than violent means. He even took it upon himself to lecture Brown on the subject.

Sanborn was glad Kansas was "at peace." He now felt her "true course" lay in formulating an effective freestate constitution to guide territorial fortunes. It was best for Kansas to use traditional "political means to end slavery."<sup>30</sup>

In May, at the time of the Forbes blow up, Gerrit Smith only wanted Brown's plan "deferred." But by July, he was telling Sanborn he didn't want to know anything about the warrior's future efforts. While Smith still claimed Kansas had been saved by her "own brave spirits" and applauded the efforts of Brown in beating back "border ruffianism," he returned to political antislavery during the late summer and early fall. During that time the Peterboro landowner reentered the political arena and ran for governor of New York. Beginning in August, he attended some fifty-three campaign meetings, traveled some four or five thousand miles, and spent about 5000 dollars seeking office. Throughout the effort he claimed to have accepted the nomination "in faith that frank, bold, persuasive speech backed by moral truth

would be more than a match for the [proslavery] press." While he knew his chances for election were not great he was optimistic about the aims of the campaign, made vigorous efforts to justify his "spontaneous" nomination, and forcefully promoted his antislavery views.<sup>31</sup>

Even though Smith realized from the beginning that his actual chances for election were slight, defeat in November left him feeling indignant and self-righteous. It seemed to him that people simply were not ready to receive the "democratic theories" he spent his life inculcating. Smith supposed that he must "live and die an unpopular politician." What was worse than his loss (for one is never sure Smith wasn't intrigued by the cultivation of his own unpopularity) was his feeling that throughout New York state antislavery sentiment was dead. By late fall, he began to change the direction of his thinking. He again became pessimistic about the prospects of a political solution to slavery. The "public mind" had been drawn away from abolition into the non-extension of slavery. Again, in the face of his own political failure and the death of antislavery sentiment, he returned to a belief in the necessity of force. Kansas owed her salvation not to politics but to "ample preparations to repel by physical force the aggressions of slavery." It was "men money and munitions" brought to Kansas by "eastern enterprise and liberality" which had really saved the territory. The Republican Party had actually become the



"protector of slavery." Perhaps Brown's effort would fail. Perhaps his mishandling of Forbes was portentous. But in the wake of political defeat Smith overlooked such possibilities. He returned to a belief in the efficacy of "men money and munitions." At the absolute minimum, an insurrectionary thrust at slavery would rekindle a "demoralized" public sentiment.<sup>32</sup>

#### IV

In the first weeks after Brown's departure, Theodore Parker also became more cautious about advocating the use of violence against slavery. Unlike his friends, Stearns, Sanborn, and Smith, however, the minister never entirely turned his back on the issue. Before he began a restful journey in the Green Mountains that June, Parker outlined his position to an audience at the annual meeting of the New England Antislavery Society. Parker claimed that it was just such meetings that were the "best manner" in which to agitate the slavery question. Though he did admit even to this group that in the various struggles between freedom and slavery, the battle had always been "settled by war," and it seemed to him that the "great and final" abolition of slavery in America would have to be accomplished in that way as well.<sup>33</sup>

By mid-summer, with Brown safely in Kansas and the Forbes episode fading from memory, the minister intensified his pleas for violence. Examining the effects of slavery in

a July speech he began by suggesting that "compulsory toil" was "not necessarily degrading." Slaves learned "certain special things" which they could not have learned in Africa. Indeed, it was a sign of the slave's "excellency" that he repudiated "individualism" and was "pliant before his master's will" while he learned these "special things." But, ultimately, the institution of slavery was "essentially degrading" because it denied blacks "history . . . science . . . arts . . . literature" and "a great war to look back on." The minister did not wonder at the slave's "despair" and went on to point out what Brown had that spring. Parker was deeply offended by the fact that the wrong blacks suffered had awakened "very little sympathy in the mass of men, who in their rudeness reverence strength and not justice." Brown was correct. A show of strength by blacks was the only way to alter the black image among white Americans. In his speech Parker also warned of the potential for violence in black men. He wondered aloud to the audience what blacks would do if the United States became engaged in a war with England and answered his own question by claiming that "at least three million [slaves] would take sides with the enemy." Free black men would "spontaneously" do the same thing. It is obvious from both of these speeches that although the Forbes affair initially jarred Parker's confidence in the warrior, the theoretical case Brown made for black insurrection continued to grip him.<sup>34</sup>

Thomas Wentworth Higginson also became more certain of the correctness of Brown's theories in the months following his departure from Boston. During the summer Higginson advised William Lloyd Garrison to read an article he had prepared on "African Proverbial Philosophy" claiming that it would present "quite a new view of the character and capabilities of the [black] race." But Higginson's most revealing expression of these "new" views are actually found in an article he prepared for the September 1858 issue of the Atlantic Monthly. Here, in an elaborate theoretical framework, Higginson fused romantic racialist attitudes, the beliefs of Brown and Repath about the black man's willingness to fight, Parker's speculations on "out-door charity," and Howe's "theory of diffusion" into a comprehensive rationale for insurrection. In this piece, Higginson achieved his fragile synthesis by reexamining the typology of courage and suggesting that violence could serve as a mechanism for value assimilation.<sup>35</sup>

In Higginson's view, there were three forms of courage. The greatest form was possessed by all "heroic races" and was called the "courage of blood." According to Higginson, men who possessed this type of courage dared perils not merely for the sake of principle but for "their own sake." Actually, there was no special merit in such courage. One either had it hereditarily or he didn't. Indeed, the courage of blood often concealed itself under the finer names of self-devotion

and high principle. As an example of this kind of courage Higginson spoke of the activities of evangelist George Barrow "who convinced himself that he was activated by evangelical zeal to spread the Bible to Spain." In Higginson's opinion it was "chiefly adventure" which lured Barrow to Spain.<sup>36</sup>

In Higginson's typology there was an environmental compliment to the "courage of blood" which was called "transmitted courage." This second type was produced by constant training and practice and could "give steadiness" to less powerful inherited forms. This "transmitted" variety was the type shared by a captain with his men. John Brown spoke of this kind of courage (though not using the same terminology as Higginson) in 1857 when he spoke of organizing freestate settlers into militia groups. In these groups "strong" men would bolster the courage of "weak" ones.<sup>37</sup>

It was, however, in the examination of a third variety of courage that Higginson fully revealed his "new view" of black capabilities. The third type of courage was the "courage of self-devotion" or courage of "emulation." It was this kind of courage that women and Africans possessed. This courage was evoked by "special exigencies" and was powerful enough to alter the character of slaves who had been "suppld" by long years of slavery and "softened" by mixed blood. It allowed blacks to pass from "cowering pussilanmity" to the topmost height of daring. Under its influence a slave's "giddy laugh" vanished, his "idle chatter" hushed, and the

"Buffoon" became hero. Self-devotion was the most noble form of courage because it entered the "domain of conscience" and was engendered by outstanding moral leadership. If black men were exposed to the right leader they would be sure to fight violently for their freedom and produce "results which seemed miraculous." Higginson himself had a hard time determining where this courage came from or what it really was. In the end, he could only suggest that it was the "element of inspiration" or a "superadded something" which was "incalculable" in effect. Though he never said so directly in the article, one is left with the unmistakable impression that the Worcester activist was convinced that John Brown was just the man to induce this "superadded something," just the man to kindle black desires to fight for freedom.<sup>38</sup>

It is unimportant whether Higginson even fully believed in his own theoretical analysis or merely forwarded it as yet another prod to his reluctant colleagues. The simple fact that he attempted such a synthesis is significant. It suggests that Higginson was trying to resolve for himself and his fellow conspirators a basic contradiction between their romantic race thinking and the contentions of both Brown and Repath. Each of the conspirators, to one degree or another, maintained a racial stereotype which was completely at odds with the underlying reason for Brown's espoused willingness to attempt to stimulate an insurrection. While each of the six men could believe in the free black man's "spontaneous"

desire to assist enslaved brethren, none of them believed the slave was by nature capable of anything more than "docile" and "pliant," though virtuous, behavior. Brown and Repath both asked them to think differently. Parker had begun the attempt to alleviate the contradiction with his preliminary re-evaluation of the usefulness of white reform activity. Higginson brought this thinking to fruition in his article by providing the mechanism (the courage of self-devotion) which, though not erasing the contradiction, allowed romantic racialism and the possibility of black violence to co-exist. The other members of the committee still had some major doubts about Brown's competency, but at least Higginson had gone a long way toward putting aside their racial skepticism and their ambivalence toward violence. He had gone beyond Higher Law for a justification of insurrection.

And Higginson did more than provide a theoretical rationale for Brown's contentions in his article. He also slapped the wrists of his fellow conspirators for their shameful behavior toward Brown during the Forbes episode. In so doing, he added further insight about the motivation of the other members for supporting the Kansas warrior.

Higginson began his criticism of the others in the introduction to the article. Here he started by claiming that it was a "foolish delusion" to believe that the combined power of gunpowder and peace had "banished" the necessity for physical courage. The demand would never pass away.

Physical courage was neither "easily set aside" nor "a mere corollary from moral courage" as "our reformers" seemed to assume. In fact, it often occurred that the leaders of an age who had ample "moral courage" were "physically timid." Certainly these introductory remarks were aimed at the men Brown had chastized a few months earlier for being "intimidated" by Wilson and "not abounding in courage." But these introductory remarks were mild when compared to those words Higginson saved for the conclusion to his piece. Here Higginson claimed that men who were committed to the "right side" of an issue too often got credit for "moral courage." In his view, the credit was unjust for their supposed moral courage wasn't really courage at all but merely an "intense egotism." This "intense egotism" helped these supposedly courageous men to isolate themselves from "all demand for human sympathy." In the "best cause" men of this type actually preferred to belong to a party which was "conveniently small." They were nothing more than elitists, who upon the "slightest indications" of "popular approbation" began to "suspect themselves of compromise." The "abstract martyrdom" of "unpopularity" was "clear gain" to them. But when it came to the "rack . . . revolver and the Bowie Knife" their "habitual egotism" made them "cowards." Such men were annoying "in themselves" and annoying because they threw discredit on "noble and unselfish reformers." Clearly, Higginson addressed these angry words to the men who had postponed

Brown's raid. Clearly, he was suggesting that their actions made both their radical abolitionism and allegiance to Brown suspect in his eyes. He implied that both were a product of elitist, egotistical, and self-serving principles and that in the end these same principles had been the reason Brown's plan was postponed.<sup>39</sup>



## CHAPTER VII

Thomas Wentworth Higginson had advocated execution of Brown's plan in the face of the Forbes disclosures. Then he showed his disdain for the secret committee's faint-heartedness by boycotting their May postponement meetings and censuring them in the Atlantic Monthly. But the minister also understood the limits to which his colleagues could be pushed, and he realized that any further public furor about slave insurrections would most certainly destroy their remaining inclination to support the project. As a result, he was quite alarmed by a short letter he received from Lysander Spooner near the end of November. Spooner was an abolitionist who had been active in Boston reform efforts for years and had recently begun to press for the use of forceful means to end slavery. In his note to Higginson, Spooner asked for an opinion of a "scheme" he had devised to foment slave insurrections. He enclosed two documents which he proposed to have reprinted and circulated extensively through the South. Both called for the violent overthrow of slavery.<sup>1</sup>

In the longer of the two broadsides entitled, "A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery," Spooner demanded that slaves be rescued from the "hands of their oppressors" by the "formation of associations" dedicated to that purpose. He wanted

private war waged against slavery by private individuals. He also called for compensated emancipation, separation of government from the interests of slaveholders, and the destruction of the "security and value" of slave property. The second, smaller document was addressed to "non-Slaveholders" and went farther than the first one. In it, Spooner stated that slaves had a "right to be free" and a "right to take that freedom by force." It was the duty of all who were able to assist this effort, particularly non-slaveholding whites. While slaves were flogging and kidnapping their oppressors, forming military cadres, and building forts from which to "carry on warfare," it was up to non-slaveholders to be supportive and let the black men "know they have your sympathy." Such support would give slaves courage and self-respect as well as making "men of them."<sup>2</sup>

From the moment Higginson saw the Spooner plan he realized what disaster would befall Brown's project if the documents were circulated. He knew the other committee members were certain to abandon Brown and disband their secret group. Somehow he had to dissuade Spooner. In his reply to the Boston abolitionist, Higginson claimed to read the broadsides with "great approbation" and suggested that increased interest in the subjects Spooner alluded to was "one of the most important signs of the times." He fully agreed that the freedom of slaves had to be accomplished "by action of slaves themselves in certain localities with the aid of secret

cooperation from whites." Insurrection would convince slaveholders of the futility of keeping blacks in bondage and would force northerners "back on the fundamental question of Liberty." Obviously remembering Brown's words as he responded, Higginson went on to claim that a "single insurrection with decent temporary success would do more than anything else to explode our present political platform." What nineteenth century America needed was a sharp slap in the face to clear its head.<sup>3</sup>

But near the end of his note Higginson cautiously moved to prevent Spooner from circulating the two pamphlets. He agreed that blacks needed help from whites but claimed to feel that the cooperation should be kept "secret." In revolutions "the practical end" always came first, "the theory afterward." Admitting to Spooner that the proposed circulation might serve to prepare the "public mind," Higginson nevertheless went on to suggest that he felt this had already been accomplished by the "fugitive slave cases" and "Kansas excitement." He then asked Spooner not to distribute anything until they could speak further. This plea was echoed by Wendell Phillips and Theodore Parker who also received notes from Spooner. Phillips said the plan was impractical. Parker, like Higginson, requested Spooner not to do anything until the two of them could "talk about it."<sup>4</sup>

Spooner decided to temporarily postpone distribution of the leaflets. Then, throughout December, he met with Parker,

Higginson, and the other Massachusetts members of the Secret Committee of Six. In order to permanently derail Spooner's scheme, the committee gave him a vague description of what Brown intended, told him how the Kansas warrior was counting on the element of surprise, and warned him that if his documents were connected to Forbes' revelations they might ruin any chance for successful insurrection. At first Spooner strenuously objected to these arguments by claiming that the slaves needed "previous preparation." But by early January he relented and agreed to drop plans for distribution of his insurrectionary documents. Later in the spring, when Brown had returned to Boston, Spooner met with the warrior and came away from their discussion "wholly" convinced his decision was correct.<sup>5</sup>

Just how much Lysander Spooner had to be told about Brown's plan in order to be "wholly" convinced is difficult to ascertain. Up until the late spring of 1859, Brown himself had been purposefully vague with the secret committee. It is quite possible, therefore, that even if Spooner knew as much as the committee did in January of 1859 he didn't really know very much at all. What Brown himself told Spooner in the late spring is unknown, though Spooner made some telling remarks years later which suggest the limits of his own knowledge. He claimed then that "very few knew much about the details of Brown's plan until it was actually developed at Harper's Ferry." Brown had broadly hinted where his

assault was to begin, specified theoretical considerations upon which he based his plan, and continually asserted his own ability to execute the project but he did not outline the specific tactics he hoped to use in the raid. In fact, Spooner came away from his meeting with Brown feeling that the aid furnished by the secret committee was given primarily because of a "general confidence" in him and sympathy with him rather "than from any intimate knowledge of the plan." Spooner's observation is partially correct. The committee did base some of its support on confidence in Brown's character. By late spring of 1859, however, four members of the committee--Sanborn, Stearns, Smith, and Higginson did know many specific details of the plan.<sup>6</sup>

During December of 1858 Brown, though still out west, played a major role in influencing Spooner's final decision. In the midst of the secret committee's negotiations with Spooner, newspaper reports revealed that Brown had run off eleven Missouri slaves during the third week in December. The raid was proof of what Boston committee members had been telling Spooner for some time: Brown had returned to Kansas to divert attention and to discredit Hugh Forbes. He would soon come east to prepare his insurrectionary strike. If Spooner sent his pamphlets south the entire effort to "decoy" Wilson, Seward, and all those to whom Forbes had spoken would be ruined.<sup>7</sup>

Actually, Brown's Missouri raid did more than help convince Spooner to end his circulation scheme. It also went along way toward informing the secret committee that he was "in earnest" and would soon be in Boston to make good on their pledge of the previous spring. Higginson was particularly excited by Brown's feat. The Missouri venture stimulated new confidence in the warrior and made the minister more optimistic than ever that Brown would be able to "make a dash" into the South. Higginson was desperate for a black insurrection. Writing in the Atlantic Monthly that winter on the need to educate women (who shared the "courage of emulation" with Africans), the minister suggested that if "contempt did not originally cause failure" it certainly "perpetuates it." Any systematic effort to discourage a class or individual would "in nine cases out of ten" cause that class or individual to "acquiesce in their degradation," if not claim it as a "crown of glory." Brown's successful Missouri raid meant that, in spite of the Forbes disclosures, he might yet stimulate enough confidence in the other committee members to regain their full support for his proposed venture. And in so doing, Brown would be given the opportunity to begin the destruction of black "acquiescence" and white "contempt." To Higginson the Missouri raid was not merely a diversionary gesture but a tactical master-stroke with which Brown hoped to win back support of the secret committee. Still, Higginson was very careful to hide his rekindled

enthusiasm. When Sanborn wrote excitedly about the possibility of Brown getting "great results from this spark of fire" (the Missouri raid), Higginson responded by claiming to have "serious doubts" that Brown would ever execute his plan. The minister obviously sought to prod his youthful committee colleague with pessimism and to remind him of the committee's previous faint-heartedness.<sup>8</sup>

Like Sanborn and Higginson, Theodore Parker was also impressed with Brown's effort. When it was suggested to the Boston minister that the warrior's conduct was motivated by a desire to avenge the murder of his son Frederick, Parker sprang to Brown's defense and labeled such accusations as unjust. If Brown had been motivated by vengeance he would have sought "cheap and easy revenge on actual transgressors in Missouri." Instead, the man had freed eleven slaves at the expense of only one white life. Parker's defense was stirring especially in view of the grave misgivings he entertained about Brown's leadership abilities only a few months earlier.<sup>9</sup>

But the Unitarian minister never got to discuss the Missouri effort with Brown or to participate in the final planning for the Harpers Ferry raid. By late January of 1859, his tuberculosis became so severe that Howe and other Boston physicians advised him to leave New England and seek healthful rest in warmer climates. In early February, Parker began a year-long journey with his wife Lydia which took him

to the West Indies, London, Switzerland, and Rome, where he arrived in early fall.<sup>10</sup>

Realizing that Parker's tuberculosis would probably "spread rapidly and remove the foremost man of the continent," Samuel Gridley and Julia Howe decided to accompany the Parkers on the first leg of their journey. The two couples had lived near each other on Exeter Street in Boston for some years and were intimate friends. Lydia and Theodore Parker, childless throughout their marriage, considered themselves second parents to the Howe children. Both couples needed a few weeks together before they were forced to part. And, in Samuel Gridley Howe's mind, there were other important reasons for the trip. Howe himself was very ill, plagued by a physical reaction to the heightening tension in his day-to-day existence. He and Julia were quarreling again. They argued about separation, family financial problems, and Julia's continued desire for a literary career. Howe was sure a leisurely vacation would do them both some good.<sup>11</sup>

After a brief stopover in Nassau the two couples headed for Cuba. Here they toured the island together for a few weeks before separating. Theodore Parker was impatient to see Santa Cruz, so he and Lydia said their last goodbye and left. Samuel Gridley and Julia decided to remain in Havana awhile longer before returning to Boston. During their stay, they met wealthy South Carolina plantation owner Frank Hampton and his wife--Hampton was the son of Senator Wade



Hampton. Despite different views on the institution of slavery, the two couples got along very well. Hampton respected Howe's work with the blind and Howe was absolutely intrigued by Hampton's acute analysis of southern politics. Before leaving Havana, the southern couple suggested that Samuel Gridley and Julia visit their plantation on the way home to Boston. The idea appealed to the Howes. They liked the Hamptons, were very interested in viewing plantation life first-hand, and hoped that the visit would help resolve some serious differences of opinion that they were beginning to have about the nature and role of the black man in American society.<sup>12</sup>

In late March, the Howes arrived at Frank Hampton's prosperous Carolina plantation. But by this time, Samuel Gridley Howe had given up all notions that a vacation would alleviate his sickness. Throughout his stay at the Hampton's the Boston doctor suffered from severe headaches. He was still anxious about Parker; continually worried about the state of his departed friend's health. Then, too, spending time on the plantation wasn't as rewarding as Howe had first envisioned. It actually made him squeamish. Somewhat belatedly, it occurred to Howe that the Hamptons were the same kind of people Brown might have to sacrifice while leading his black insurrection. Howe realized that it was one thing to talk about taking white lives for black freedom and quite another to share the hospitality of the intended white

victims. More than anything else, however, Howe's uneasiness, his tension and headaches were due to a new aggravation in his already strained relationship with Julia.<sup>13</sup>

Julia Howe had begun to revise her abolitionist notions. She had become irritated by the "calm satisfaction" with which some men divided the "national moral inheritance." She disliked the fact that because of slavery the South had been given "all the vices" and the North "all the virtues." Julia was put off by the "habitual, sneer, denunciation and malediction" which had become "consecrated forms of piety in speaking of the South." Northerners were not absolved from their "labor for amelioration" of slavery but must restrain themselves from the "infliction of wrong" and set bounds which "the wickedest dare not pass."<sup>14</sup>

Obviously impressed by the Hamptons' handling of their slaves, as well as a vivid recollection of blacks she had seen during the trip, Julia Howe felt she must be allowed "one heretical whisper--very small and low." She now believed the "Negro of the North" was "an ideal negro" who was "refined by white culture" and "elevated by white blood." But the "negro among negroes" was something entirely different. He was "a coarse, grinning, flat-footed, thick skulled creature," who was ugly, lazy, and "chiefly ambitious to be of no use to any in the world." Even so, Julia felt strongly that slavery must "gradually ameliorate" and "slowly die out." While she admitted that anyone who gave a "mild . . .

pallative view . . . of slavery" should be subject to "bitter censure," she also asserted that "intellectual justice" revolted from "rhetorical straining, exaggeration and denunciation of facts" which northern abolitionists continually employed.<sup>15</sup>

If Julia Howe was at once censorious of inflated abolitionist rhetoric, under estimation of white southern virtue, and over estimation of black capabilities, she could still wonder why the negro was so despised in the South. In her view his "gentle, attachable nature" should not have caused such hatred. But even though she saw the black as "gentle and attachable" and was mildly impressed with Cuban negroes (they were "fair" physically) she would not recant her general assumptions about blacks when she was criticized by her husband. She justified her position in a letter to Theodore Parker late in 1859, just after she had published the revealing recollections of her journey in a small book entitled A Trip to Cuba. At that time she admitted that her "little spurt about blacks" had "caused some remark" but claimed that "without asking council of anyone" she would stick to her resolution to write what she thought no matter whom it offended. To Julia Howe, the aspiring writer, nothing was more vicious than to make "observation conform to theory." She was positive her observations of black nature were "genuine, clear and immediate." Abolitionist theory would just have to "make the best of it." After witnessing the "natural

indolence" of blacks her convictions about the necessity of "compulsory employment" were strengthened, though she claimed not to be arguing for slavery.<sup>16</sup>

There is no question that Samuel Gridley was deeply disturbed by his wife's views. He argued with Julia during the trip and during the months she prepared for the publication of A Trip to Cuba. As he painfully noted at the time of publication, "Some things make me sad, e.g., the question of whether viewing the actual condition of the negro enforced labor is not best! As if anything would justify the perpetuation of such a wrong by the strongest race." His own impression of blacks in Cuba led him to some other conclusions. According to Howe, "climatic influences" were better for blacks in Cuba and as a result blacks were "physically improving." Other influences didn't help as much. Howe was particularly concerned that there was "no organized effort for their [the blacks] improvement, no organized effort to keep them from going wrong." Mentally blacks were "rising" but morally they were "sinking." It is quite obvious what Howe was suggesting by such comments. In a sense, he was arguing the same case that John Brown had been arguing for two years. Simply stated, both men felt that blacks once freed would need the firm discipline of a righteous and moral man. Brown had drawn up the Provisional Constitution for just such a reason and he had recruited highly moral and upstanding men to help execute the raid.<sup>17</sup>

Howe attached himself to Brown's cause in the spring of 1859, at least partially, for the same reason that he separated his own racial views from Julia's. Both of the Howes accepted a romantic racialist image of the black man's capacity and ability but they seemed to divide over the question of the derivation of that nature. Julia tended to emphasize heredity over environment, though she never entirely dismissed the influence of white culture on the black man. The doctor placed even greater importance on the environmental causes of the black man's nature. And it was because he stressed the impact of environment in his definition that Howe looked to Brown to lead an "organized effort" for black "improvement." Getting blacks out of the debilitating institution of slavery through justified violence and exposing them to a "normal" person like John Brown was the same thing as moving the blind out of permanent residence at Perkins School and back into the "normal" community. Like Higginson, who looked for Brown to illicit black violence by stimulating the courage of emulation, Howe believed a violent effort by blacks would be their first step out of slavery--a "morally uplifting" stride into the "normal" community. Justified violence and the willingness to fight for freedom were really keystone virtues among the righteous men and women of the Anglo-American community. Parker, Howe, Higginson, and the rest of the secret committee all agreed that the essence of the American political experience had been freedom earned by

the willingness to fight. Brown's raid would acquaint the blacks with this virtue. Brown would demand that blacks make an effort for their own freedom--something even Julia Howe admitted was a prerequisite for black liberation. In so doing Brown would break the vicious circle of environmental debilitation and begin black assimilation of a "superior" culture. Blacks would then start to exhibit the behavior of "normal" men--men who lived day-to-day in the marketplace North. If exposure to "normal" persons could help the handicapped, then exposure to Brown and violence could do much for the moral sensibilities and social outlook of the black slave. John Brown and justified violence would get the slave "on the road to perfectibility." The slave would be organized under the "proper influence."<sup>18</sup>

When Howe arrived home in mid-April he found a letter waiting for him from Brown. In it, the warrior advised him that all was going well and asked what efforts were being made to raise the funds promised during the previous spring. The only thing hindering successful execution of the raid was a "trifling sum." Brown used the Missouri raid as a negotiating lever when he noted that the "entire success of our experiment ought (I think) to convince every 'capitalist.' . . ." The old man was ready to move and Howe sensed that this time there would be no false starts or Forbes-like interruptions. Despite some uneasiness about reports that Brown had taken property as well as slaves during the

Missouri venture, Howe began to seek funds for the "dash" south.<sup>19</sup>

## II

Just a few days before Howe arrived in Boston, read Brown's letter, and began to search for money, the warrior began his own fund-raising efforts at Gerrit Smith's home. He appeared at the landowner's Peterboro mansion on April 11, and almost immediately started analyzing the Missouri raid. Then he brought Smith up to date on the status of his Virginia Plan and cautiously inquired about Smith's willingness to contribute funds to the enterprise. At first Smith seemed reluctant to make any commitment. The only thing he seemed interested in was a religious discussion. The philanthropist hoped to continue the theological debate they had begun one year earlier, just before Brown revealed his plan to strike at slavery in the South.<sup>20</sup>

Underlying all of Smith's activities for the past two and a half years was a strong desire to reexamine his personal religious convictions. During this period the Peterboro squire wrote three discourses on the "religion of reason." Smith began the whole review process in December 1857, while recuperating from a severe case of typhoid fever which had hospitalized him in New York City for over two months. His illness reenforced an ever-present notion that he was "ill and destined for an early grave." When this fear

of his own death was coupled with the phenomena of religious revival sweeping the northeast in the spring of 1858, Smith continued his intense reconsideration of religious principle. Although he was gravely suspicious of theology (what was important was the practical application of Christian ethics), he started writing his first discourse on the "struggle for a religion of reason" in early January of 1858 and had just finished the piece when Brown arrived at Peterboro in late February to unveil his Harpers Ferry project. Smith introduced his first discourse by suggesting that in America over the last half century nothing had contributed to a religion of reason more than the temperance and antislavery movements. They had "awakened a sense of human dignity and human rights." Both movements helped dispel the belief that salvation depended only on believing in doctrines. Both had shown the fallacy of believing that it was immeasurably more important "to have orthodox views in regard to the Trinity, the atonement, and future life than to imbibe in the spirit of Christ." Smith himself was searching for creeds that would "grow out of life" and as far as he was concerned "true religion" would only prevail when men were "judged by their life and character rather than adoption or rejection of creeds." For Gerrit Smith reason under God was the final judge of all questions.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, despite Smith's radical theological posture, a unique religious symbiosis took place between he and Brown as they waited for Sanborn to arrive in Peterboro. Smith had



never really shed much of the Calvinist teaching of his youth. And as a result, while he and Brown would disagree on the role of the Bible in a man's religious life, they could agree on many fundamental spiritual principles. Smith's "manner of stating his argument was considerably more terrifying than his doctrine." Indeed, Smith like Brown believed in a God of Divine Providence and Inspiration, he believed in the necessity of conversion, baptism, communion, and the future life. Like Brown he also read the Bible regularly and claimed the privilege of interpreting it as he saw fit. The religion of Gerrit Smith was a blend of radical posturing and traditional content.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, Smith's religious discourse was something more than an examination of sacred things. Religious discussion with Brown allowed him to vent his radical, laissez-faire, anti-institutional wrath. Smith seems to have used their spiritual debate as a vehicle to express certain social concerns. The debate appears to be both reality and rubric. And it is for this reason that Brown was not worried when Smith diverted his first efforts to discuss the commitment of funds in April of 1859 by turning instead to notions he was formulating for his third discourse. Brown acquiesced because he realized the Peterboro squire was still caught up in feverish pietistic speculation and that in the past such concerns had helped him compose as much of his social theory as his religious. Brown realized that by listening closely

to what Smith now said about "true religion," he would have just as accurate an idea of Smith's willingness to subsidize insurrection as if Smith had spoken directly on the subject. Very soon after Smith had launched into his newest religious consideration, it became apparent to Brown that he would indeed be able to count on Smith for support.

Smith started the discussion by asserting that he now believed every individual's religion "must stand in his own judgment" and that the one standard by which a man must test his religion was within and not without. Not only must a man's conscience be his guide but until it was no legitimate religious community could be formed. Smith downplayed the significance of the Bible, feeling that the individual "deeply dishonored" God by surrendering his own judgment to it or the church. While both might surpass the individual in wisdom, the individual could not claim credit by simply adopting that wisdom. True wisdom (like true courage for Higginson and true morality for Howe) "became our own by being wrought into our convictions and made part of ourselves." One became truly religious by acting truly religious. Smith was calling for an age when men "scorned to work for party," and age where men should "identify themselves with all mankind and aspire to no lot than their individual merits under Heaven's blessing can earn for them." Through a religious metaphor, Smith was propounding radical individualist views that squared in all essentials with those

of Brown. Indeed, the warrior could hardly have missed the implications for Smith's eventual support of the proposed "dash" at slavery. And Brown's intuition about Smith's support was fully confirmed when the philanthropist began to develop a less abstract definition of the truly religious man. For Smith, the truly religious man was "one who kept all his passions, appetites and interests in subjugation to reason." For the squire from Peterboro there could be "no greater test of a man's religion." Certainly Smith viewed Brown as just such an individual. After all, Brown had labored for nearly two years to establish that image with Smith and the other members of the secret committee.<sup>23</sup>

There was another "religious" reason for Brown's optimism about Smith's support. Smith believed that even the "most barbarous people" could be christianized if ministered to by a proper teacher. He, like his committee associates who were concerned about exposure to "normal persons," was sure that a true man of religion could impart that religion to others. At once, Brown could be insurrectionist and secular missionary. The man who could pass the greatest test of religion could surely impart the greatest of all religious virtue: control of all "passions, appetites, and interests." Smith would support Brown for the same reason the others did. He would support Brown because the man could exert a great moral and organizing influence on blacks.<sup>24</sup>

After listening to Smith discourse on religion for the better part of two days, Brown was sure he would be able to count on the landowner's support. His assumption was correct. When Smith stopped talking and listened as Brown again outlined his plan, he expressed complete sympathy with the project. To Brown's repeated contention that black men must be given the chance to strike for their own freedom, Smith responded affirmatively by religious analogy. He noted that when Jesus saw that men were "enslaved to authority" he realized that the "experience of truth could alone set them free." Jesus himself "took men up out of bondage to superstition and out of . . . debasing . . . blinding submission to authority." He threw men "back upon their own consciences and councilors and demanded they should judge for themselves . . . what is right." Jesus' first effort had been to "individualize and insulate each man." Brown himself could not have made a more eloquent "religious" defense of his position.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of their second day of intense private discussions, ones which wove religion and insurrection into the same fabric, Smith asked Brown to speak before a group of abolitionists who lived in the area and Brown consented. At the gathering the warrior made a stirring (though purposefully vague) appeal for funds to support his "work." Edwin Morton attended the meeting and later claimed that Brown's appeal actually moved Smith to tears. When Brown had

finished speaking Smith immediately stood up and pledged 400 dollars for his support. Then Smith briefly addressed the group. According to Morton, Smith fervently claimed that if he were asked "to point out the man in all the world I think most truly Christian, I would point out John Brown. I once doubted in my own mind as to Captain Brown's course, I now approve of it heartily having given my mind to it more of late."<sup>26</sup>

Brown left Peterboro appreciative of Smith's contribution and fully convinced he could count on him for more in the future. The warrior stopped briefly at North Elba to visit his family and then hurried to Boston to promote his project, obtain funds, and recapture the committee's confidence.

Once in Boston, Brown sought out the one individual who had never refused one of his requests, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn. The young secretary was most responsive. Ever since early January when Sanborn read of Brown's daring Missouri raid in the New York Tribune, he realized the days of discussing the feasibility of Brown's project were over. He knew that as soon as Brown got back east he would want the funds promised to him the previous spring. Brown had executed his part of the bargain to decoy Forbes and would now expect Boston members of the secret committee to honor their part of the arrangement. Sanborn knew also that it was unlikely that any other incident like the Forbes disclosures

would erupt. Higginson, Parker, and Howe had handled Spooner nicely and Forbes himself hadn't been heard from for months. Sanborn was sure of another thing: he would bear major responsibility for gathering the "2000 to 3000" which had been promised Brown. Parker was leaving for Europe, Howe was going on vacation in February and March and Stearns was totally absorbed in the financial problems of his friends. Since Higginson only responded to Brown, Sanborn knew the task would be his and his alone. He was very anxious.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout February, March, and the first three weeks of April, Sanborn frantically searched for funds. But during the first two months of his effort he had little success. The secretary was hindered by the tight money situation in Massachusetts, the relative quiet in Kansas, and the need for secrecy. By late March he was so desperate that he sought out George Cabot with the advanced intention of opening the "whole matter" to him if that was what was necessary to get funds. Cabot had contributed 100 Sharpe's rifles to the Massachusetts Kansas Committee during the early days of its existence. It seemed worth the risk to Sanborn to fully inform him of Brown's plan in exchange for support. At the last moment, however, Sanborn balked and for some unknown reason found it "not advisable" to enlist Cabot's aid. By mid-April, Sanborn had virtually nothing to show for two and a half months of effort. Finally, when the secretary visited Howe shortly after his return from the West Indies, he

received some promising words about acquiring finances for Brown. Howe said he personally could not be counted on for large sums but firmly believed his friend John Murray Forbes, the wealthy Boston railroad magnate, would be willing to make a substantial contribution if Howe sent him a strong character reference on Brown. Sanborn breathed a short sigh of relief. At least he had some good news for Brown.<sup>28</sup>

On April 19, a few days after his visit to Howe's, the committee secretary hurriedly scratched a brief note to Higginson which read: "Brown himself is in Boston." Though responses to his fund-raising efforts had been poor, Sanborn was quite relieved to see him. Soliciting for support was always easier when Brown appeared in person to make the request. Sanborn quickly explained the difficulties he had encountered. Brown claimed to understand but was still quite angry. After all, the secret committee had promised to subsidize his work. Eventually the two men decided that Brown should personally seek funds in other parts of New England for a few weeks. While Brown traveled, Sanborn would arrange speaking appearances for him in the Boston area.<sup>29</sup>

For the next three weeks Brown toured New England. As he did, he began to sense the real problem Sanborn had in seeking contributions. Funds for the antislavery cause had dried up and he was tremendously disappointed. Some two weeks after leaving Boston, Brown received word from Sanborn that he was to make a speaking appearance in Concord early in

the second week of May. Brown greeted the news with relief. Massachusetts abolitionists had been generous in the past and he hoped this would again be the case.<sup>30</sup>

Brown appeared in Concord with one of his recruits, Jeremiah Anderson, and spoke to virtually the same gathering that he addressed two years earlier. But again his much publicized visit was a dramatic success and financial failure. He obtained only a small sum from his appreciative Concord listeners. Just why Concord citizens received Brown so warmly and gave so little is difficult to determine. Certainly they were not exempt from the financial toll of economic panic. But by the spring of 1859 the effects of panic had begun to wear off and a tight money supply doesn't seem to have been the major reason for their reluctance to give. Most likely, Brown's Concord audience was uncertain about how the warrior would use the money and about what he proposed to do to end slavery--Brown was vague on both counts. Bronson Alcott expressed this sentiment best. He claimed Brown left his Concord friends "much in the dark concerning his destination and designs for the coming months" but "did not conceal his hatred for slavery nor his readiness to strike a blow for freedom." Brown's most perceptive listeners may also have noticed that he was more enthused and less controlled than during his first visit to Concord. This may have made them wary. Still, despite Brown's intensified tone, Alcott continued to regard Brown as "the manliest man" he had ever



seen. The warrior was "the type and synonym for the Just."<sup>31</sup>

In view of the financial failure at Concord, Frank Sanborn was extremely pleased that Samuel Gridley Howe made good on his promise to enlist the aid of John Murray Forbes. Very soon after the Concord visit Brown was on his way to meet Forbes with a letter of reference from Howe. In the letter Howe described Brown as a man who could "deliver our land from the curse of slavery," and praised the warrior for being "of the Puritan militant order." Howe recommended that Forbes assist Brown because he was "an enthusiast, yet cool, keen and cautious." Forbes should also bear in mind that Brown had a "martyr's spirit" and would ask "nothing but the pledge to keep to yourself what he may say." The recommendation combined with the short speech Brown gave to clergymen gathered at the Forbes home greatly impressed the railroad magnate. But he was judicious with his funds and gave only 100 dollars to Brown for "travelling expenses." Before the warrior left Forbes' home, however, a representative of the ministers approached him and pressed five twenty-dollar gold pieces into his palm.<sup>32</sup>

Despite Howe's favorable letter to Forbes and his intense personal desire to answer questions about black capabilities, friction developed between the doctor and Brown soon after the Forbes meeting. Howe really never forgave Brown for the role he had been forced to play the previous

spring. Brown's indiscretion made it necessary for Howe to lie to his friends and the doctor didn't like it. He alone bore responsibility for putting Wilson and Sumner "off the track" and the effort still left a bitter taste in his mouth. For months Howe had been deeply impressed by the values and character of Brown--impressed by his discipline, control, and efficiency. Now, one year later, the doctor was still upset by Brown's apparent failure to live by the very principles he had initially seemed to embody. Mistakes like the Forbes fiasco were unforgivable. Howe was also made uneasy by a slight change he perceived in Brown's tone and temperament. The doctor sensed a subtle difference in the day-to-day manner of the "cool enthusiast" which irritated him further. Brown seemed overly excitable, exceptionally nervous, and at times unbearably imperious. He seemed absorbed by considerations quite apart from his immediate surroundings. He seemed too easily upset by criticism and repeatedly, almost mechanically, quoted Scripture to quell any doubts expressed by his supporters. This kind of behavior deeply disturbed Howe. The blind biblical spoutings and strong disembodied aura about Brown hinted at a loss of control. Howe was forever chastising himself for such behavior. He liked it even less in a man who was about to incite a slave insurrection.<sup>33</sup>

The friction between these two men actually resulted in a minor confrontation over the tactics Brown used during his Missouri raid. Howe balked at Brown's seemingly cavalier

attitude toward the theft of slaveholder's property during the run-off. Stealing slaves was one thing. But stealing the physical property of the slaveholder was entirely different. Howe kept remembering the Hamptons. The doctor and warrior actually exchanged heated words over the issue. Brown claimed he was right in taking property earned at the expense of slavery and muttered a scriptural justification of his acts. Howe responded by reasserting his own view and claiming he was entirely unimpressed by men who quoted Scripture to cover unlawful activity. Theft was theft.<sup>34</sup>

But even if uncertainty and anger caused Howe to doubt Brown, the physician did not withdraw his support from the proposed insurrection. Concern about Brown's competence and unresolved ambivalence about violence (masquerading as a worry about slaveholder's property) did not drive him away from the plan. There were too many new and unanswered questions buzzing in Howe's head about antislavery reform and the nature of the black man once freed from slavery. Brown's intended strike was one of the ways in which these and other questions could begin to be answered. And there were other reasons for continued support of the warrior. During that spring Howe wrote to Charles Sumner and noted the "importance and duty of giving the fullest and finest scope to individuals." Each man must be encouraged to "work with his own weapons in his own way." To allow this, implied a faith in God's providence.<sup>35</sup>

When Howe reflected on his experience with Brown during the past two years he realized much of the warrior's erratic behavior had been stimulated by not being allowed to fight for the freedom of the slave "with his own weapons" and "in his own way." Brown's imperiousness was a product of frustration. Perhaps if he was given "the fullest and finest scope" for his activities, black men all over the South would rally to his banner. Then, too, Howe once again reflected on traditional political efforts to end slavery. They had all failed. Indeed, political currents seemed to be "drifting toward the destruction of the Republican Party." Much as he wanted to have faith in that party, by the spring of 1859, Howe believed strongly that it had contributed to its own demise. Any party "based on the principle of progress and reform" must die away when "it ceased to call for any progress." The antislavery movement had failed to extinguish slavery and so had the Republican Party. Where was one to turn except to a man like Brown?<sup>36</sup>

During the weeks Brown spent in Boston he also met with George Luther Stearns on a number of occasions. Their most memorable public exchange took place at the Bird Club, an informal gathering of Massachusetts politicians, literati and businessmen who regularly met at the Parker House. Here, before the many distinguished members of the club, Brown presented Stearns with the pearl-handled Bowie knife he took from Henry Clay Pate at Black Jack. The gesture deeply moved

Stearns, though he was mildly upset by the warrior's presentation speech. When Brown gave him the knife he said he did so with the thought that the two of them would probably "never meet again in this world." Brown hoped Stearns would accept the gift as a "token of his gratitude" and claimed that in the future the knife might have some "little historic value." The obvious fatalism in Brown's words disturbed Stearns. For months he had been led to believe that, though there was a chance Brown would be killed, Brown fully expected to come away from his venture alive and ready to command a mountain fortress full of black men. Stearns was also disturbed by the angry exchange that took place between Brown and Henry Wilson after the presentation. Wilson was intensely distressed by the Missouri raid and made it clear that he "did not approve" of it. His censure drew a sharp rebuff from Brown. Stearns was shocked by the vehemence of Wilson's comments and realized for the first time what his relationship with Brown might mean for his future standing in the political abolitionist community of Massachusetts. Still, Stearns' uneasiness did not prompt him to pull back from supporting the Kansas warrior. When Brown left Boston he did so with 1200 dollars which had been contributed by the Medford businessmen.<sup>37</sup>

Whether by mere chance or Brown's careful planning, one incident which occurred in late May did a great deal to bolster the confidence of Howe, Stearns, Higginson, and Sanborn

in the project. Harriet Tubman, the black woman whose underground railroad activities were legendary, appeared in Boston to support Brown. Tubman's visit seemed to buttress what the Kansas warrior had claimed all along: once the insurrection was started southern slaves could depend on the support of their free northern black brethren. Sanborn was particularly impressed by the imposing woman. He immediately notified Higginson of her presence and asked him to come to Boston. The minister would be "amazed" at the rescue stories she told. The secretary also hoped Tubman's appearance would prompt Higginson to tap the Worcester County Committee funds which both he and Brown had been pursuing for months.<sup>38</sup>

Higginson did travel to Boston to speak with the powerful Canadian black woman and after listening to her descriptions of eight railroad trips to the South, he was indeed "amazed." Her "tales of adventure" were beyond anything in fiction and her "ingenuity" was extraordinary. But the trip to Boston did more than strengthen Higginson's belief in Brown's project. As he saw the efforts being made for Brown by Stearns, Sanborn, and Howe, the Worcester activist became less critical of their decision to postpone the plan during the previous May. Now they all seemed very interested in keeping their promise to raise funds for the venture and even showed some confidence that the whole effort would succeed. In particular, Higginson became more charitable toward Sanborn who was again playing a very active role in Brown's

behalf. As a sign of this new-found respect for the young secretary's exertions, Higginson promised to stop in Concord during July to evaluate the progressive educational program Sanborn and his sister Sarah had devised for the children of the town.<sup>39</sup>

### III

After having collected almost 2000 dollars from secret committee members and other New Englanders who knew little or nothing of his proposed plan, John Brown left Boston on June 3, 1859, for the last time. He was generally pleased by his fund-raising efforts and felt that "final arrangements" could be made for the Harpers Ferry raid. He confided to Sanborn (who most certainly conveyed the message to the other committee members) that he expected to be "on the ground" as soon as possible and hoped to begin operations "by July 4th." Brown seemed optimistic. He had funds, arms, a crew of fine men, and continued hopes of "recruiting people from Harriet Tubman's ranks." On his way to New York City, the warrior stopped at Collinsville, Connecticut and made the last payment on the 1000 steel pikes he had ordered from blacksmith Charles Blair two years earlier. Everything seemed ready.<sup>40</sup>

From his Peterboro mansion Gerrit Smith carefully followed the proceedings in Boston that spring. As he did, the intensity of his commitment to Brown and insurrection increased. Before Brown left Boston the Peterboro squire

forwarded an additional 200 dollars for his "Kansas work." But Smith's commitment is reflected by more than the allocation of funds. He had just finished working on his third religious discourse and the degree of influence Brown had on him is clearly indicated in the tract. For three years Brown had been telling Smith that he felt a divine inspiration, a mission to free slaves and overthrow slavery. For the same length of time Smith had just as vigorously advocated a "religion of reason" which emphasized man and conscience not doctrine, the Bible, or God's providential manipulation of human events. Now in June, 1859, Smith made a revealing theological concession to Brown. Before submitting his final discourse for publication, Smith felt compelled to incorporate the notion of divine inspiration into his own religious theory in a way which significantly departed from his previous treatments of the concept. In his third discourse he asked whether or not reason alone was sufficient to achieve "true religion" and answered that it was not. Smith asserted that "unless Divine influence" upon men was increasing there could be no "true religion." Enlightened reason was vain unless there was also a "God-given spirit of submission to its control." Reason and will were vain unless man allowed "his maker to work in him." Man must let Heaven dispose him to put his physical, mental, and moral powers to "heavenly use." Certainly these notions about inspiration can be interpreted in many ways. They may be seen as just another



manifestation of Smith's desire to maintain certain well-established Calvinist concepts while advocating a radical religion of reason. It has already been shown that during Smith's religious perambulations he always held to certain basic Calvinist tenets. And Smith was never one to worry about maintaining seemingly antithetical positions at the same time. Yet, it also seems that Smith's need to discuss inspiration and the emphasis he accorded it is reflective of both Brown's argumentation and Smith's view of him as the "greatest living Christian." Smith's support of Brown was based primarily on his regard for the warrior's individualist values, on Brown's control, discipline, and ability to "restrain passions and appetite." But, at least in part, it was also premised on a belief in Brown's assertions of his own providential instrumentality.<sup>41</sup>

Smith indicated the strength of his support for Brown more fully in the months ahead, particularly in the way he handled his annual invitation to speak at the Jerry Rescue commemorative ceremonies on October 1, at Syracuse. When the invitation was submitted to Smith in late August he declined to speak. The refusal was extraordinary. Smith had participated in the rescue effort and had always used the ceremony to elaborate his abolitionist views. The speeches he gave in the years following the attempt were harbingers for his continually shifting thoughts on the direction in which abolitionism should be moving. In 1856, for instance,

he used the occasion to lash out at the moral decadence of southern slaveholders, claiming they were victims of "a total delusion" which had been endorsed by most of the churches and clergy of the country. Slavery was ruining the slaveholder "soul and body for time and eternity."<sup>42</sup>

But in August of 1859, Smith shocked and disappointed many who had shared the occasion with him previously by asserting that it was "unwise to repeat the farce any longer." The rescue attempt had been a noble effort. Its participants had had their "humanity up" when they acted to resist Jerry's arrest. They understood there could be no law for slavery. But as far as Smith was concerned, it was now time to again "let . . . professions make room for practice." People who talked well for slavery should stand aside for those who would vote well against it. Actually, Smith pushed abolitionists to do more than vote. He went on to suggest that any declarations which were made against forcible resistance to the laws of slavery were "senseless." It was to instances of forcible resistance that nations were "indebted" for their "greatest progress." American government was in rebellion against the "right of every innocent man to his personal liberty." Indeed, it was because of this rebellion against justice that the New York abolitionist felt it might be "too late to bring slavery to an end by peaceful means--too late to vote it down." Rather, it must "go out in blood." In Smith's opinion there was not enough virtue left in white men

for them to vote slavery down. Blacks had "come to despair accomplishment of this work by white people." The feeling among blacks was that they must deliver themselves and it was a feeling that "gained strength with fearful rapidity." There was no resource left to black men but "God and insurrection." Smith then promised that white Americans could look for insurrections "any year, any month, any day." Insurrection was a "terrible remedy" but it was necessary to overcome a "terrible wrong." Even an abortive uprising would have an effect. It would fill the South with horror and startle northern moral sensibilities. Smith closed his letter with a warning to all those who took his remarks lightly. He was "not a lying prophet--another Cassandra." Slaveholders' blood would be shed--soon.<sup>43</sup>

## CHAPTER VIII

Before John Brown left Boston for his base of operations, he promised to start his insurrectionary thrust by Independence Day. But once he arrived at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, he realized that the promise would be impossible to keep. There were good reasons to delay the raid. None of the Canadian or northern radical abolitionists who had hinted they might be willing to join him came south and when Brown revealed that he wanted to instigate a full-scale attack on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry some of the men he had recruited began to grumble. Then, too, Brown himself became extremely cautious. Throughout the summer he continually postponed the attack for fear that he did not have enough intelligence information. These delays caused financial problems. Maintenance costs for the small cadre of recruits and his payment to Charles Blair all but depleted the funds he had received in Boston that spring. By early August he again pressed Sanborn for money so that his "operations" would not be delayed. He also sent John Jr. to seek further support from George Luther Stearns.<sup>1</sup>

Sanborn received Brown's request and immediately wrote to Higginson asking for assistance. Sanborn claimed to take great pleasure in hearing that the warrior had completed the first phase of his "business" and pleaded with Higginson to

help him make up 300 dollars so as not to thwart final execution of the plan. But by the first week in September, the committee secretary hadn't come close to raising the amount Brown desired. Samuel Gridley Howe did send 50 dollars south and then started scurrying around Boston looking for more money. Higginson could only raise 25 dollars for Brown. When Sanborn pressed him for more, the minister became infuriated by the implication that he was somehow shirking his duty. At the same time that Sanborn looked for funds Stearns listened to John Jr.'s pleas for assistance. Stearns told him that he had the "fullest confidence" in his father "no matter what the outcome of his efforts," but the Medford businessman refused to give anymore money. Finally, in the third week of September, Sanborn sent 50 dollars to Chambersburg along with an apologetic note explaining why he was unable to raise the full sum Brown had requested.<sup>2</sup>

For the next two weeks Sanborn continued to search discreetly for funds. On October 6, that search ended when Sanborn met and interviewed young Francis Merriam, the emotionally erratic nephew of the distinguished Boston abolitionist, Francis Jackson. Merriam was obsessed with the thought of joining Brown and asked Sanborn to give him specific information about the warrior's plans. He already knew a good deal about the scheme because of his friendship with James Repath. At first, Sanborn balked. But when Merriam offered to contribute 600 dollars to the effort if he were

allowed to participate in it, the committee secretary reconsidered the request. Sanborn quickly summoned George Luther Stearns and Lewis Hayden to Concord to assist him in making the decision. During the evening of October 6 and the early morning hours of October 7, all three men rigorously questioned Merriam about his motives for wanting to join up with Brown and the personal qualifications he had for assisting the scheme. Merriam said he had traveled with Repath in 1857 and 1858 as the journalist gathered information for his book Talks with Slaves. In spite of these experiences neither Sanborn, Stearns nor Hayden were impressed with the unstable youth. But all of them knew of Brown's desperate need for cash. Merriam might not be qualified to participate in the project but the money he would contribute insured execution of the plan. Eventually, they all decided to send him to Chambersburg.<sup>3</sup>

Within a few days Sanborn received a note from Merriam indicating that he had joined Brown, turned over the 600 dollars and patiently awaited the "business operation" that was to commence Saturday, October 15. Sanborn was tremendously enthused. Later, when he received a letter from Higginson complaining about Brown's failure to execute the plan and questioning the wisdom of sending Merriam south, he felt so confident that Brown was about to begin the venture that he boldly criticized Higginson for his doubts. Sanborn asked Higginson if they had "seen so little print" from Brown's labors "that we should distrust . . . his valor?" Hadn't Brown "saved Kansas in '56 and wounded Missouri in '58."

There was absolutely no reason to doubt Brown. The secretary also met Higginson's criticism of Merriam with a highly matured cynicism. Merriam had not been chosen because of any "great passion for Repath" or belief in the youth's personal capacity. Sanborn agreed that Merriam was about "as fit to be in the enterprise as the Devil to keep a powder house." Merriam had been selected only because of the money he could contribute to the project. Sanborn reminded Higginson that "everything has its use and must be put to it if possible." Then, after informing Higginson that news could soon be expected from the site of Brown's activity, the secretary concluded his letter with a brief lecture on one of the most important lessons he had learned in the past few years. Sanborn told Higginson that he never expected much from anybody but believed there was "a grain of use in all persons and things." When a plum dropped in one's mouth, one shouldn't refuse to eat it because it wasn't "a peach or a pumpkin." Francis Merriam might not be "Divine property" but he was a "plum" and had his use.<sup>4</sup>

By Monday, October 17, a few days after he received Sanborn's note Higginson was forced to agree. Merriam had been useful. His money had primed an explosion at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Reports circulated in Worcester about an attack on the federal armory in that small southern town and Higginson was thrilled. In fact, he thought of rushing south to assist Brown and claimed he would have done it if it

weren't for his wife's poor health. He considered Brown's venture the "most formidable insurrection" that ever occurred, felt there was "great capacity and skill" behind it, and was sure it would weaken the Slave Power. In the past nothing had so strengthened the institution of slavery as the black man's "timid submission." Now, as Higginson heard the first, sketchy, reports of the raid, he was confident that such submissiveness was ended. If this new assertive attitude was coupled to "constant communication with Canada" it would teach blacks "self-importance and resistance." Since first reports of the raid were incomplete, Higginson eagerly awaited Brown's retreat to the mountains where he would establish a Maroon colony, like those in Jamaica. Hoping to publicize the positive effect that such a fortress community would have on blacks and at the same time discreetly link himself to Brown among those abolitionists who were not already aware of the connection, Higginson wrote James Russell Lowell at the Atlantic Monthly asking if he could do an article about the Maroons of Surinam and Jamaica--"suggested by the late Virginia affair."<sup>5</sup>

The minister's initial optimism was soon replaced by utter dejection because further reports from Virginia indicated the raid had failed. After quickly joining Howe, John Andrew, and others in forming a defense committee for Brown, the minister spent the next week reading newspaper accounts of the attack and carefully gauging the impact it had on



northern public opinion. In a speech given at Brimley Hall in Worcester on October 25, the day Brown's trial began, Higginson claimed that "nine out of ten of the republic of Worcester sympathize with the insurrection and only regretted that Captain Brown was not successful." Despite this bold claim Higginson knew that in Worcester there was less enthusiasm for insurrection than the man who attempted it. People were unsure about the act even though they had a strong, personal sympathy for Brown himself. This situation forced a predicament upon the minister. On one hand, he knew that given such tremendous popular sympathy Brown's martyrdom would be a powerful spur to antislavery sentiment. On the other, Higginson himself had very strong feelings that he should make some kind of effort at rescue. Higginson's ambivalence is fully reflected in his emotional response to his mother's scoldings about the failure of Massachusetts abolitionists to do anything to secure Brown's release. Higginson told his mother that of course he thought about Brown's plight but claimed he didn't feel certain the warrior's "acquittal or rescue would do half as much as his being executed." He assured his mother that a defense committee was doing all it could for Brown. They had provided counsel and even sent a young Athol lawyer named George Hoyt to assist Brown and to act as a liaison with his Massachusetts supporters. Beyond such help no way seemed open for anything. There was "no chance for forcible assistance and next to none

for strategem." The minister had never seen a situation more impractical for rescue.<sup>6</sup>

Higginson was torn between the desire to make a rescue attempt in spite of its impracticality, and the desire to exploit Brown's death for the cause of abolition. No doubt he remembered the advice of Wendell Phillips and Albert Browne in the wake of the Burns rescue attempt. At that time the two men told him to shake off any despair about the failure of his efforts. Burns rendition was a secondary matter. What was essential was Higginson's effective use of the issue to influence popular opinion against the Fugitive Slave Law. Higginson had been involved with the tactics of abolition long enough to understand the effect Brown's death would have on the mind of the northern white community, abolitionist and non-abolitionist alike. While no specific documentation exists to prove the contention, it also seems certain that at least a small portion of Higginson's willingness to subsidize Brown was based on this realization. After the Burns affair there can be no question Higginson clearly understood that a failed abolitionist effort often did as much for the cause as a successful one. He said as much in a letter to John Jr. shortly after the raid aborted. Higginson told young Brown that his father "had failed in his original effort only to succeed in a greater result."<sup>7</sup>

It has been suggested that Thomas Wentworth Higginson denied John Brown by never again admitting what he had when

first reports of the attack filtered into Worcester, namely, that the warrior's actions were directed at inciting the "most formidable slave insurrection ever." He has been criticized for waiting a long time to make even a veiled attempt to explain the absence of a slave uprising at Harpers Ferry. But this so-called denial becomes more understandable as we examine Higginson's awareness of the way in which northern public opinion responded to Brown. Higginson's overriding concern in the days after Harpers Ferry was to exploit the personal sympathy that welled up for Brown and was fueled by his heroic trial behavior. As Higginson saw it, his primary task and that of other northern abolitionists was to promote Brown's character and play down the act of insurrection. Tactically this was simply a variation on the same theme used by Howe, Parker, and Phillips when they attempted to remove Edward Loring from his probate judgeship after the Burns rendition. Higginson knew that many northerners had not accepted the justification of violence and insurrection; therefore it was necessary to evoke their empathy by personalizing the issue. It was not insurrection which was justified but Brown's character. In this way Brown could do "more than Sumner or Kansas to re-awaken antislavery agitation." John Andrew, the abolitionist lawyer and state representative, made the point most clearly in an address to abolitionists who gathered at Tremont Temple shortly after Brown's sentencing in early November. Andrew claimed not to consider

"whether the enterprise of John Brown and his associates in Virginia was wise or foolish, right or wrong." He only knew that "whether the enterprise was one or the other, John Brown himself was right." Like Higginson and other noted abolitionists, Andrew claimed to sympathize with the man and the idea, because he believed in "eternal right." He never said anything about sympathizing with the actuality of insurrection.<sup>8</sup>

## II

Julia Howe read about Brown's raid in the Boston Transcript. When she told her husband, he is said to have casually replied, "Brown has got to work." That simple assertion belied Howe's tremendous inner turmoil over the seemingly disastrous results of the attack. This turmoil flared into panic on Wednesday, October 19, when an investigation uncovered letters written to Brown by Howe and the other members of the secret committee at the Chambersburg headquarters. While Howe claimed to be confident that Brown wouldn't compromise himself or those dealing with him, he couldn't help remembering the Forbes fiasco. During the weeks following Brown's arrest, the doctor was virtually paralyzed by the fear of being implicated in the venture. Although he joined Higginson, John Andrew, and others in setting up a defense committee for Brown, his apprehension prompted vehement opposition to even the discussion of using extra-legal efforts to

gain the warrior's release. And the fear also forced Howe to become excessively dependent on the advice of Frank Sanborn. This dependence is ironic because Sanborn was quite as unnerved by the whole episode as the doctor.<sup>9</sup>

In February 1858, shortly after leaving Smith's home with Brown's newly revealed plan ringing in his ears, Frank Sanborn received a short letter from Edwin Morton. In the note Morton recounted a curious experience with Brown. It seems that shortly after Sanborn left Peterboro, Brown asked Morton whether he would mind accompanying him on a short evening walk. Morton said he'd be happy to. After walking side by side through drifts of freshly fallen snow for some time, Morton began to daydream and lost consciousness that Brown was walking with him. Then when he realized what he had done and he turned to apologize to Brown for allowing his mind to wander, Morton found that he was indeed walking alone. He turned around to look for his companion and saw Brown a few yards behind him. The warrior was alternately looking at the fresh imprints his boots made in the snow and the untrodden expanse that lay before him. After a few moments of silence, Brown looked thoughtfully backwards where his and Morton's footprints lay uncovered in the snow, he turned to Morton and spoke slowly, "I like to see my tracks behind me." Morton felt like he was in the presence of a man who would "leave tracks in the snows of centuries." And Sanborn heartily agreed. After Harpers Ferry, however, Sanborn was

considerably less sentimental about the "tracks" Brown left behind. Those "tracks" were incriminating letters from himself, Howe, Stearns, and Smith which were left in a leather sachel at the Chambersburg farm house Brown had used as his base of operations. They led all the way back to Boston, Peterboro, and the Secret Committee of Six.<sup>10</sup>

On October 19, many newspapers carried the first full account of the contents of the sachel. In it there were two letters from Sanborn, a note from Gerrit Smith, and an envelope addressed to Brown from Howe. The two letters from Sanborn were dated September 4 and 23, and contained drafts for 50 and 55 dollars respectively. In the draft sent on September 23 Sanborn told Brown he was "glad to hear all goes well and is so ready for business." Even more disheartening to Sanborn and the other committee members was the New York Herald's published report on the questioning of Brown's men about northern assistance. The Herald noted that all of prisoners stories were the same except for "Young Brown." He answered a question about whether or not his father had received support from radical northern abolitionists by saying there were "parties in the North connected with this movement."<sup>11</sup>

Sanborn was very distraught when he read these reports. Late in the afternoon on Wednesday (the same day the account was printed) he rushed to Stearns' home in Medford to decide what action he should take to prevent the inevitability of

arrest. After consultations which lasted into the early morning hours on Thursday, October 20, the two conspirators decided to seek the assistance of Stearns' legal counsel, John Andrew. In their meeting with Andrew both men wanted to know if they were liable to arrest in Massachusetts for their complicity with Brown, though they did not give Andrew the "full particulars" of what that complicity entailed. Since Andrew was uncertain about what the two men had actually done, he was only able to give vague answers to their questions. Stearns and Sanborn became more upset. As a precautionary measure against arrest, they decided to run to Canada for safety. Late Thursday afternoon they boarded a cargo ship bound for Quebec. One day later they arrived in Canada.<sup>12</sup>

Once in Canada, however, the two secret committee members began to have second thoughts about their flight. Both Sanborn and Stearns feared arrest and fled Boston hoping to avoid it but during their stay they began to see how panic had intensified the threat. At the same time they attempted to rationalize their behavior by claiming that they only left Massachusetts to keep the size of Brown's effort concealed. By so doing, both the reach and character of the raid would be "exaggerated." While in Quebec the two conspirators received further disheartening news about their legal position. Wendell Phillips sent a detailed analysis of Andrew's views. According to Phillips, the lawyer now believed

Stearns' and Sanborn's complicity could be regarded as treason. These words shattered both men. A year earlier they were certain that such treason would be considered patriotism by most northerners. Now they were confused about where they should be, uncertain about what they should do and doubtful about support from the citizens of Massachusetts. It seemed that treason would not be considered patriotism.<sup>13</sup>

Phillips' letter did contain some information that gave them hope. Andrews felt that if they were arrested for treasonous activity they could only be "tried in the district where the acts had been committed." This advice, coupled with Higginson's urging that they come home immediately, a tearse note from Emerson suggesting the same thing, and their own worries about running away, prompted a return to Boston on October 26 just six days after they had started their panic-stricken flight. They arrived home just in time to read newspaper accounts of Brown's stoic trial behavior. Unquestionably, the guilt they already felt was compounded by the warrior's heroic posture. But that guilt was not enough to prevent either man from further flights, further denials of complicity, further rationalizations, and further panicked discussions about the possibility of arrest.<sup>14</sup>

In Worcester, Thomas Wentworth Higginson was shamed and angered by the dichotomy between Brown's behavior and that of his fellow conspirators. He saw their actions as nothing more than a shabby re-enactment of the cowardice that



characterized their activity during the Forbes disclosures. The same patterns of moral self-righteousness and non-existent physical courage were appearing once again. And Higginson didn't like it. In fact, he was so outraged that he began to re-enact some behavior patterns of his own. This time he decided to do more than boycott a few meetings to show his displeasure. This time he tried to completely dissociate himself from his fellow committee members. This time he would separate himself by more than a few stinging words in the Atlantic Monthly. Though he fully realized the importance of Brown's death to the antislavery movement and though knew the logistical impracticality of any rescue effort, Higginson began toying with the idea of rescue. It was his way of divorcing himself from Sanborn and Stearns and atoning for the dishonor their acts brought to the committee. Years later, Higginson claimed he acted because he would have been "ashamed of doing nothing for Brown." But during the last days of October, as Brown's trial proceeded to its inevitable conclusion, the minister thought of rescue less out of shame for having done nothing to help Brown, than out of shame at being associated with the other members of the Secret Committee of Six.<sup>15</sup>

As Brown's trial ended on November 2 and he was sentenced to hang one month later, Higginson began a "mock" attempt to free the warrior--a symbolic gesture of dissociation. He traveled to North Elba ostensibly to pick up Mary

Brown and bring her back to Boston from where she was to begin the journey to her husband's side in Charlestown. Higginson actually made his trip to the Brown homestead for a far different reason. He hoped to persuade Mary Brown to argue the case for rescue with her husband who up until then had steadfastly spurned all such suggestions. The minister was counting on a plea from Mary to change Brown's mind and convince him that escape was still desirable. Even if Brown refused Mary's request, Higginson knew her visit wouldn't be wasted. It was sure to "evoke sympathy."<sup>16</sup>

On November 4 Mary Brown arrived in Boston with Higginson. She was warmly greeted by many prominent members of the Massachusetts abolitionist community at a reception in the American House hotel arranged by Sanborn, Stearns, and Howe. Early the next day she departed for New York City accompanied by George Hoyt, who had recently returned from Virginia, Thomas Russell, and Higginson. When the group reached the city, Higginson turned around and headed back to Worcester. The others continued on to Philadelphia where Higginson had arranged for Mary to be met by J. Miller McKim who was to accompany her to Charleston. But soon after his return, Higginson received a telegram from George Sennot another young Massachusetts lawyer sent to Virginia by Brown's Boston defense committee. Sennot told Higginson that Brown had been informed of his wife's pending visit and did not want to see her. The warrior felt certain the meeting

would only distract Mary's mind and add to his own "affliction." He didn't feel a visit could possibly do any good. Higginson immediately notified McKim, explained Brown's reluctance to see his wife, and asked that Mary not be taken south.<sup>17</sup>

Higginson doubted that Brown's desire to see Mary was merely a "matter of sentiment." It occurred to the minister that Brown might be worried about her being called as a witness in the pending trials of others caught in the raid. Higginson also felt something other than Mary's well-being prompted Brown's refusal to see her. Mary Brown might not only be distracted she might also distract. Mary's appearance might disrupt the image of Brown as a solitary warrior struggling against the institution of slavery. Higginson now strongly sensed that Brown knew (better than anyone) the implication of his own martyrdom. Brown's composure at the trial and his consistent refusal to save himself by pleading insanity or contemplating rescue, all led Higginson to wonder at the "mysteriously inept" handling of the raid. Brown's veto of Mary's visit stimulated that wonder even more. Higginson was now certain that Brown fully understood how much a failed attempt at insurrection could mean to abolition, and his own historical identity. A failed attempt could mean as much as a successful one--perhaps more. It could mean that others would see Brown's "tracks" in the snows of centuries, that the further inscriptions on the

Brown family gravestone would have meaning and that there would be no speculation about the historical significance of his gift of Pate's knife to Stearns. For a failed ex-businessman martyrdom at Harpers Ferry could mean success, in the wake of an inglorious string of failures.<sup>18</sup>

Soon after the effort to send Mary Brown to Charleston had failed, Higginson wrote a short note to the Brown children explaining what had happened. He told them of their father's reluctance to consider escape but suggested that something might still be done for him. Higginson claimed that there was always a possibility their father would change his mind once he realized his sentence would not be commuted. But there can be little doubt that Higginson made such remarks only to bolster the children's spirits. By early November, the minister fully realized Brown would not change his mind. He never mentioned it to the children but Higginson knew their father wanted to die.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the minister's sense of Brown's wish, two letters further reinforced his conviction about the impracticality of rescue. On November 7 Higginson received a note from John LeBarnes, a former Kansas freedom fighter, who had traveled to Charleston to check on the feasibility of rescue. LeBarnes told Higginson that the whole idea of escape was the furthest thing from Brown's mind. The warrior would not listen to it. Six days after receiving the LeBarnes letter, Higginson heard from James Repath. The journalist's note

convinced Higginson that his assumptions about Brown and martyrdom were correct and all but ended his flirtation with rescue. Repath wrote from Baltimore where he had traveled in search of members of the raiding party who had not been captured. He told Higginson that he heard rumors about a planned rescue attempt and expressed surprise that anyone would undertake such a scheme. Repath didn't want Brown freed. He didn't have the faintest hope that the warrior would escape from martyrdom. Brown's death meant too much to abolition. Repath himself had already begun the effort to enhance the warrior's reputation. As soon as "Old B was in heaven" the journalist intended to publish a biography which would glorify Brown's martyrdom and quietly repudiate "the notion that his wrongs in Kansas had any influence on his present movements." Such notions cheapened the Harpers Ferry attack and degraded Brown "from the position of Puritan (warring for his Lord) to a guerrilla chief of vindictive manner."<sup>20</sup>

Higginson understood the implication of "Old B's" martyrdom. He understood the catalytic effect Brown's death would have on northern antislavery sentiment. He understood Brown's repeated refusal to cooperate with rescue efforts was based on a complete understanding of his martyrdom's impact. He knew of the near strategic impossibility of actually breaking the warrior out of jail. Yet, he continued planning. Higginson did so in direct response to his fellow

conspirators who continued to behave in ways which angered and disturbed him. Making such efforts, even if they were ritualistic, provided a dramatic way in which to dissociate himself from their acts.

Higginson also felt Gerrit Smith squandered his reputation by the way he acted after Harpers Ferry. In August, Smith boldly predicted insurrection "any month, any week, any day," but Brown's capture shocked and unnerved him. Fearing his own implication (especially when some of his letters to Brown were found at the Chambersburg farm house), Smith immediately sent his son-in-law Charles Miller to Boston to collect all other letters that might link him to the scheme. Smith's Peterboro mansion was guarded day and night and parcels arriving for the landowner were inspected for bombs. During Brown's trial and while he awaited the gallows afterwards Smith became deeply distraught and spoke of going to Virginia himself to assist the warrior. Just what he intended to do by such action remains a mystery.<sup>21</sup>

Smith's biographer suggests that these feelings of shock, anger, fear, and guilt put a tremendous strain on the philanthropist in the weeks following the raid. Indeed, he suggests that when this strain is coupled with the residual effects of Smith's bout with typhoid in 1857, the exertions of the gubernatorial campaign in 1858, and Smith's arduous religious research in 1859, the reformer's breakdown in the second week of November is quite understandable. Smith is

said to have gone "down under a troop of hallucinations." He supposedly stalked around the Peterboro mansion ranting about his responsibility to Brown and claiming he ought to go south and join the warrior. Because his family believed he might try to actualize these fantasies they had him committed to Utica Asylum under the "humoring notion" that he was indeed going south to share Brown's fate. At Utica, Smith was attended by Dr. John P. Gray during the next four weeks. Then, shortly after Brown went to the gallows, Smith was released from the asylum, spent a few weeks recuperating at Gray's home, and returned to Peterboro on December 29 fully recovered.<sup>22</sup>

It is difficult to say whether or not Smith actually did break down only to recover miraculously in four weeks. There is no doubt that Smith had a long history of physical and emotional collapse in the face of extreme tension. On a number of occasions such breakdowns were treated by isolation, rest, and relaxation. And it is entirely possible the trauma caused by Brown's capture and his own implication in the scheme demanded repetition of such therapy. It is also possible his incarceration at Utica was an elaborate effort to avoid arrest. However, to suggest that Smith went "temporarily insane" as one historian has is quite another matter. No accurate medical analysis of his collapse exists and a breakdown under pressure is a far cry from insanity. What is certain about this whole episode is that Smith, like his

co-conspirators in Boston, had contemplated Brown's failure but not prepared himself for his own implication in the effort. Neither Smith nor his committee associates ever dreamed that Brown would leave letters behind in Chambersburg. Brown's mistaken character evaluation of Forbes was one thing; the idea that he did not have enough sense to burn correspondence before venturing out to Harpers Ferry quite another. Nor did Smith understand Brown's seeming ineptitude in getting the raiding party trapped inside the federal armory. If Brown was anything he was a disciplined, controlled, and competent guerrilla leader. Given such eventualities Smith's nervous breakdown seems plausible. In any case, Smith and his family must have realized that a brief stay at Utica made a great deal of sense whatever his condition. The asylum was the perfect sanctuary in which to avoid the retributive acts of proslavery adherents and to await the actions of authorities who were investigating the possibility of conspiracy. By mid-December, when it looked as though the only prolonged investigation of the affair would be handled by a Senate committee chaired by James Mason of Virginia, Smith felt he could relax. Word had it that Mason was more intent on playing down the notion of conspiracy than exposing the existence of one.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to Smith's so-called "insanity," Thomas Wentworth Higginson continued to be disappointed by the behavior of Stearns and Sanborn. During Mary Brown's visit



to Boston, the two men incessantly discussed the eventuality of arrest and what to do about it. Rumors also circulated that Stearns had asked George Sennot to retrieve the supplies Brown used during the raid in order to recoup some of the money he had invested in the project. Sanborn continued to contemplate a flight to Canada. He claimed to have "no intention of going to Canada to avoid arrest as a criminal nor for any cause," but he rested that claim on the stipulation that he could be "reasonably sure" of being protected by his Concord townsmen. And though he often stated he would "hate to leave" Massachusetts he asserted he wouldn't hesitate to do it rather than go to jail for six months or a year.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the first two weeks of November, the panicky committee secretary frequently huddled with Andrew for advice though still holding back "full particulars" of his participation in the conspiracy. The advice Andrew gave him wasn't pleasing to hear. Andrew believed that under an 1846 law a material witness could be arrested by warrant from a U.S. judge without any previous summons. While there was some possibility for a writ of habeus corpus in the procedure, the lawyer felt that unless a state judge was willing to rule the law unconstitutional the only way a witness could be released was "by tumult." When Higginson wrote to Sanborn advising him to seriously reconsider running to Canada, the secretary somewhat angrily insisted that if he, Howe, and Stearns had

the same assurance of citizen protection which Higginson had there would be no need to run. Sanborn also lectured Higginson on the undesirability of Brown's rescue. He claimed to agree with Bronson Alcott that the "spectacle of martyrdom" would be of "greater service to the country than years of agitation by Press and voices of partisans." Higginson didn't need the lecture. By this time he was certain Sanborn was more concerned with Brown's deathly silence than his deathly service.<sup>25</sup>

The minister was also upset by the poor advice Sanborn seemed to be giving Howe and Stearns. Prompted by Sanborn's views on the reasonableness of flight, and Andrew's dismal assessment of their legal position, both men fled to Canada shortly after Mary Brown's visit. They were reluctant to leave Massachusetts but decided that unless a resolution was introduced in the Massachusetts legislature to protect them they should stay in Canada as long as it was necessary. Howe's rationale sounded remarkably like Sanborn's. The doctor claimed that Brown's "best chance" was "the appearance of acting upon his own motive and responsibility . . . without the active cooperation of organized Committees or from . . . individuals of the North."<sup>26</sup>

It was Higginson's view that flight documented conspiracy far more completely than if secret committee members stayed home. But even in his anger at the activities of Howe, Sanborn, Stearns, and Smith, Higginson continued only a

ritualistic consideration of rescue and had all but abandoned the scheme during the first two weeks of November because of his own realization of the importance of Brown's martyrdom. He abandoned the idea, that is, until November 15 when he picked up a copy of the Worcester Telegram. That day the Telegram and other newspapers around the state contained a disclaimer card from Samuel Gridley Howe. In the card Howe attempted to justify his flight to Canada and disavow any responsibility for John Brown's actions. He insisted that he had no specific knowledge of the Harpers Ferry raid, implied he had no general knowledge either, and suggested that his expatriation should "draw attention to the infamous act by which slaveholders throw a lasso over northern citizens."<sup>27</sup>

When Thomas Wentworth Higginson read the denial card he immediately roughed out a response. He thought it was one thing to rationalize flight quite another to begin believing in ones own rationale. In fact, Higginson considered it to be "extreme baseness" for Howe to deny complicity in Brown's general scheme. He reminded Howe of his suggestion that secret committee members make no statements about their relationship to the warrior. The minister understood the impropriety of judging other men's acts but said he could not help but feel that Smith's "insanity" and Howe's card were the "only two bad results of the whole affair." It would be the "universal" opinion of all "intelligent" people that the

doctor denied "all knowledge" of the raid, "not merely the precise time and place." Higginson knew this was false.<sup>28</sup>

Surprisingly, Higginson did not send his rebuke to Howe. Instead, he drafted a second note of protest and sent it to the individual whose advice he suspected was behind Howe's act, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn. In a brief letter to the secretary, Higginson asked if there was "no such thing as honor among confederates." Sanborn replied by apologizing for Howe's card but claiming not to accept the minister's conclusion that it was the "height of baseness." Sanborn said he saw good reason for any effort to prevent southerners from knowing who Brown's accomplices were. Then he made what Higginson must have construed to be a ridiculous assertion. Sanborn claimed that if names of the conspirators were kept secret they might "work in the same way" again. As far as Sanborn was concerned, it wasn't "any worse to conceal the facts now than before the outbreak."<sup>29</sup>

What worried Sanborn much more than Howe's card was the possibility of erratic behavior by the volatile Higginson. Any factual testimony by the minister about the secret committee's activities would be disastrous and Sanborn knew Higginson was capable of doing just that if only as a gesture of atonement for the "dishonorable" acts of his fellow conspirators. The minister's testimony threatened Sanborn far more than Smith's "insanity," a few burnt letters, some trips to Canada or a denial card. So Sanborn tried to head

off any such action. In his reply to Higginson, he suggested that the minister could recoup his own "honor" by declaring himself in Brown's plot. But Sanborn warned Higginson that he had no right to implicate anyone else. Only such an implication, declared the petulant committee secretary, constituted the definition of "baseness." Maybe Howe hadn't "acted well in all ways" but neither had Higginson. Sanborn concluded his note by suggesting that "so long as each person acts for himself we must allow some diversities."<sup>30</sup>

The covert efforts of Sanborn, Stearns, Smith, and Howe to deny their relationship with Brown prompted Higginson to contemplate a rescue attempt, if only as a gesture of disdain for their acts. He needed a lever of dissociation. Yet, up until Howe's card and Sanborn's petulant reply to his remonstrance, Higginson held back from total commitment to the rescue. His efforts were more ritualistic than real. Now, in the face of Sanborn's rejection of the scheme and Howe's contention that Brown's death would be "holy and glorious," the minister began a serious effort to gain the warrior's freedom. He would not allow men who were totally lacking in physical courage to dictate his actions. Ironically, it was just as Howe wrote to Andrew from Canada and confessed that he was beginning to believe he had "come away from Boston on a fools errand," that Higginson began the process of separating himself from the other committee members by returning to his plans for rescue.<sup>31</sup>

The minister first wrote to Sanborn. He assured the secretary that he would not "expose the whole matter" and he would not reveal the names of the other secret committee members if he decided to testify about his own role in the affair. Next, he contacted John LeBarnes and resumed discussion of rescue. LeBarnes seemed to be more optimistic about an attempt than he had been a few days earlier. He now felt a rescue project might have a chance and that assistance could be obtained in Kansas. Finally, Higginson began considering specific rescue proposals. Lysander Spooner suggested chartering a boat, sailing up Chesapeake Bay, kidnapping Virginia's governor Robert Wise and then exchanging him for Brown. When LeBarnes heard of the scheme he applauded its audacity but wasn't sure it would work. He and Higginson thought in more conventional terms. They debated a variety of infantry assaults on Charlestown, though both realized that some one thousand soldiers guarded the town and a direct infantry attack could only be accomplished with 200 to 300 men. The two men also discussed the possibility of sneaking a handful of well-trained mercenaries into Charlestown. Stealth might be more effective than strength.<sup>32</sup>

Five days after LeBarnes and Higginson began their debate, Lysander Spooner contacted the minister and notified him that LeBarnes had recruited men, a pilot, and a boat for the "Richmond expedition." Spooner expressed full confidence that the plan would work if someone would furnish the money.

On November 22 Higginson received another report from LeBarnes in which the freedom fighter assured him that one of the plans they had discussed could be managed. Only the money was "uncertain."<sup>33</sup>

But the same day Higginson also heard from Brown and the letter severely dampened his enthusiasm for rescue. Brown tried to explain more fully why he had refused to see his wife and also wanted to assure everyone that though he was unable to write he had not forgotten their love and kindness. Brown's obvious effort to appear heroically resigned to his own death stunned Higginson and made his rescue gestures seem foolish. When Higginson coupled this feeling with the pessimistic tone of a report LeBarnes sent him on November 24, his momentary sense of foolishness was converted into a decision to totally abandon the rescue project. LeBarnes wrote about the progress he was having in recruiting men and, in the process, signaled his skepticism about the Richmond plan. He said that he didn't feel well enough about the scheme to go in other than a supervisory capacity and claimed to agree with Wendell Phillips that "success would be brilliant-- defeat fatally inglorious."<sup>34</sup>

Even though both Higginson and LeBarnes had really given up on the idea of rescue, they played out the charade during the course of the next few days for appearance sake. On November 27, LeBarnes notified Higginson that 15 to 25 men had been assembled and were ready to attack Charlestown or to

execute Spooner's Richmond scheme. The men were resolute and confident of success, though LeBarnes himself thought that under the circumstances such confidence was unwarranted, even "strange." If 1500 to 2000 dollars could be raised, the "desperate chance" could begin; if not the whole matter must be forgotten. LeBarnes didn't have to wait long for an answer. One day later Higginson notified him that the money could not be raised. Within hours the minister received a simple reply from his confederate: "objects abandoned."<sup>35</sup>

Soon after receiving this confirmation from LeBarnes, Higginson wrote to Lysander Spooner to explain the reasons for failing to carry out a plan. There were several objections to an advance on Charlestown. It was "absurd" to assume that money could induce the "worst men in the country to a desperate act." Anyone of them could have made twice as much by betraying the scheme. The same held true for Spooner's Richmond plan. Near the end of his note Higginson said he felt "most unwillingly compelled to abandon the hope of redeeming the honor of the Free States in the only way open-- by the rescue of John Brown."<sup>36</sup>

At one level of intention Higginson was entirely sincere in his efforts to rescue Brown. He had the natural and laudable desire to save an admirable individual from what he considered to be an unjust execution. If the minister could have saved Brown he would have. But to suggest this does not mitigate Higginson's equally strong impulse to see Brown



martyred. Higginson knew quite well the significance Brown's death would have for the abolitionist movement: it would inflame popular indignation in the North. Even if most northerners were just as horrified by the thought of insurrection as southern slaveholders, Brown could be portrayed as a man of the highest Puritan virtue "warring for the Lord." The intense personal sympathy which went out to him could eventually be converted to the cause of abolition. What is more, Higginson knew perfectly well that Brown himself understood and relished this fact. Thus, in examining the correspondence between Higginson and those who helped develop rescue plans, one senses an underlying reluctance to ever carry out such plans. Not only were these schemes practically impossible, they were also at odds with abolitionist exploitation of popular sentiment. As LeBarnes noted, defeat of an attempt would have been "fatally inglorious." It is in this context then that Higginson's remarks about "Free State honor" and "honor" among confederates should be interpreted. Higginson's effort was less of an attempt to redeem northern integrity than an attempt to redeem the integrity which he believed had been squandered by the other members of the secret committee. In the wake of Canadian flights, Smith's retreat to Utica, Howe's disclaimer card, and Sanborn's repeated denials of complicity with Brown, Higginson felt compelled to dramatize his contempt of such behavior by a mock rescue effort. It was his way of

boycotting the actions of the secret committee; his way of dissociating himself from their lack of probity. Perhaps the most poignant symbol of the way in which Higginson used the rescue attempt is the comment he made to LeBarnes at the end of one of his letters. While other members of the committee were making exertions to destroy all incriminating evidence, Higginson warned LeBarnes not to burn any of their correspondence. Some demonstration of integrity and conviction had to be made by those individuals who subsidized Brown. Higginson believed he was the only committeeman capable of doing it.

## C H A P T E R I X

In Rome, Theodore Parker read about Harpers Ferry in letters written by his many Massachusetts friends. As he did, he grew more and more certain that the money contributed to Brown by the secret committee had not been thrown away or "wasted." Over three thousand miles from America, separated by a vast ocean from threats of arrest or trial, Parker felt free to speak calmly and rationally about the whole affair. As far as he was concerned, Harpers Ferry was just the beginning and "many acorns must be sown before one comes up." But if Theodore Parker could remain dispassionate about the episode, such was not the case with his longtime friend and fellow secret committee member, Samuel Gridley Howe. The doctor was thoroughly confused, and his panic-stricken behavior from the time he was notified of the raid's failure until Brown was hanged in the first week of December underscores that confusion. Howe was terrified by the possibility of his implication with Brown and looked for other men to make decisions for him. When John Andrew told him that he might be indicted or imprisoned and Sanborn justified any action to prevent arrest Howe guiltily ran to Canada. It wasn't until just before Brown went to the gallows that the doctor was able to regain control of his emotions.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after Brown's execution Howe asked Andrew for a re-evaluation of his legal status and an estimate of public sentiment in Suffolk County toward those who might have assisted Brown. Andrew did not give him encouraging news. Efforts to change the law of 1846, by which those implicated with Brown could be compelled to give testimony, had bogged down in the Massachusetts legislature. Even though Andrew had written numerous letters to newspapers assuring Massachusetts citizenry of Howe's innocence, he did not feel that people were aroused enough about the issue to prevent the doctor from being taken outside of the state. Andrew also told Howe about rumors circulating throughout Boston of the possibility that a special United States Senate committee would be selected to investigate the raid. The lawyer felt that, if these rumors were true, Howe, Stearns, and Sanborn would surely be summoned to testify. He speculated that once in Washington anything could happen. They might be "spirited over the river to Virginia and lynched; or taken by Va. authorities and proceeded against as accessories before the fact if they gave Brown aid and comfort for general purposes even if they were ignorant of special purposes."<sup>2</sup>

Despite Andrew's dire prediction, this time Howe didn't panic. He was waiting for an opinion from Charles Sumner about the state of affairs in the nation's capital. Howe was certain that Sumner's views would be more accurate than Andrew's. Besides, Howe wanted to testify. He had begun to

feel that it would be a better way to alleviate his problems than continued flights to Canada. He wanted to atone for his behavior during the past two months and was beginning to feel bolder now that the only person outside of the secret committee who could give prima facie evidence against him was dead.<sup>3</sup>

By the middle of December, rumor became fact. A special investigating committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Senator James Mason of Virginia. As soon as news of the committee's appointment reached Boston, Howe, Stearns, and Sanborn met and debated their course of action. Sanborn refused to consider the possibility of going to Washington when Howe suggested it. Stearns was less adamant. Sanborn was certain Andrew's assessment of their fate was accurate: a trap was being set for all who were suspected of assisting Brown. When Howe disputed this view but could not prove otherwise (he hadn't received a reply from Sumner yet), he and Sanborn argued. Howe wanted to testify. He felt guilty for having issued the disclaimer, felt a strong need to recoup his public reputation, and he was tired of panicky trips north. Then, too, Julia was expecting their fourth child at the end of the month; he wanted to be with her.<sup>4</sup>

Sanborn wouldn't budge. He would not testify just to "avoid a conflict." He would not honor a summons because he was certain that was what the South wanted. And there were other reasons for resisting Howe's arguments--reasons Sanborn

kept to himself. Unlike Howe, who only received second-hand information about Brown's movements in the last few weeks before Harpers Ferry, Sanborn was directly linked to the warrior in the days prior to the raid. If the committee ever found Francis Merriam and persuaded him to talk, Sanborn knew he would be in deep trouble. Sanborn was also beginning to believe he could count on protection from arrest by Concord's citizenry should he ignore the summons. Above all, Sanborn resisted testifying because he felt certain his own contentions about the hearings were correct: they were an elaborate pretext to lure Brown's friends into prison. The thought of a jail sentence terrified him.<sup>5</sup>

The intensity of his fear is clearly reflected in his treatment of Francis Merriam. A few days after meeting with Howe and Stearns, Merriam appeared at the door of Sanborn's Concord home looking for help as he dodged arrest by Virginia authorities. He was heading toward Canada and needed food, shelter, and funds before continuing his journey. Sanborn refused to see him; refused to have anything to do with the "plum" who only a few weeks earlier had been of such great "use" to the cause of freedom. The secretary later claimed that his inaction had been governed by "a regard for his [Merriam's] safety," that Merriam was "wholly crazy," and that to have been seen with him would have jeopardized the entire secret committee. There is, however, little question about whose safety most concerned Sanborn. He did send his

sister Sarah to speak to Merriam and Sarah, in turn, sought Henry David Thoreau's help. Thoreau introduced himself to Merriam as "Mr. Lockwood," took the youth to the Concord train station, and gave him a ticket to Canada.<sup>6</sup>

Because Howe had not received word from Sumner about the political climate in Washington, he grudgingly conceded that Sanborn might be correct about the possibility of a trap. So both he and Stearns went back to Canada to await Sumner's assessment and continued the debate about their course of action. They remained in Canada for a little over a week and then came back to Boston ready to give evidence as long as they didn't have to "give their bodies." Howe was determined to "own up" to his part in the affair and he told Andrew this in a letter written from Canada just before his return. When Andrew received the letter he immediately informed Sanborn. The young secretary again made efforts to quell Howe's desire. Writing the doctor on December 19 (a few days before Howe and Stearns returned) he assured Howe that his reasons for going to Canada were "righteous," that he should not be upset at Higginson's criticism of the disclaimer card and that such criticism was by no means reflective of popular opinion about his behavior. According to Sanborn, Howe should not feel pressed to testify in order to regain his reputation. He had never lost that reputation and should understand that Higginson's remarks to the contrary were "extravagant." Sanborn desperately tried to head off Howe's

testimony by convincing the doctor that he had no reason to atone for his behavior. The secretary also tried to hold Howe in place by suggesting that once information came in from Washington on the nature of the investigation they could all act publically. He seemed to hint at a willingness to testify in some other forum than a Washington hearing room.<sup>7</sup>

Actually, Sanborn's hint was only a ploy. He had no intention of testifying anywhere. About the same time he wrote Howe indicating a desire to act in public, he also wrote Higginson and scolded him for leaving incriminating letters in John Andrew's possession. Sanborn was bent on destroying every piece of evidence that could possibly tie him or any other committee member to Brown. He also told Higginson that he believed Boston abolitionists should direct all their attention toward challenging the federal government's right to compel individuals to leave their own state in order to give testimony before a committee like Mason's. Sanborn felt that repeal of the 1846 statute was a good issue for reformers to stand on and said he hoped Henry Wilson could be persuaded to lead the fight. No matter what anyone said, Sanborn knew that abolitionists didn't "stand a chance" in Washington D. C. How could they? It was a place that couldn't protect its own senators, an absurd sanctuary for "creeping things" called office seekers.<sup>8</sup>

As already suggested, the effort to stop Howe from returning failed. The doctor and George Luther Stearns came



back to Boston fully intending to appear before the Mason Committee. Both men were buoyed by Sumner's contention that they had "nothing to fear from Virginia's menaces." They called for a meeting at Henry Wilson's offices on the day before Christmas and asked that Sanborn and Martin Conway, an ex-Kansas Committee agent, attend. When the group convened, they first had to endure an outburst by the tempestuous Wilson. The Senator was furious about the whole Harpers Ferry episode, claimed he would do nothing to block summonses from the Mason Committee, and insisted that anyone called to Washington to testify ought to do so. Wilson felt that any attempt to avoid testimony would endanger Republican Party chances in the coming fall elections. If it wasn't made clear to the public that the party had nothing to do with Brown and had not sanctioned his violent, illegal activity, then all hopes of increasing party strength in Congress were doomed. Wilson also assured the group that they would be perfectly safe in the capital. Howe was angered by Wilson's outburst and defended Brown's effort by claiming that the warrior only strove to carry certain "currents of antislavery thought to their logical sequence in action." But when tempers finally settled, Howe, Stearns, and Conway reaffirmed their desire to face Mason and the other members of his committee.<sup>9</sup>

Frank Sanborn did not agree to honor a committee summons. He believed that Howe and Stearns were mistaken in

their decision and condemned Wilson for acting like "a craven and a blockhead." As far as the secretary was concerned, there were "a thousand better ways of spending a year in warfare against slavery than by lying in a Washington prison." By the time he received his summons in early January, he was so upset that even assurances of protection couldn't keep him in Concord. So he fled to Canada. Once there, he claimed that friends and family urged him to go away. He also sought to legitimize his flight by writing Mason and making a request he knew the Senator could not allow. Sanborn claimed that he was willing to give testimony but only in Massachusetts. But what Sanborn really wanted to do was "go abroad" and join Edwin Morton who had fled to England at the first news of Harpers Ferry. Sanborn also toyed with the idea of taking up permanent residence in Canada where he could go on with his work for the black man. There he could continue to "set an example" and continue to make antislavery his "business." He could "go down among the fugitives and explore their condition with a view to some better organization of them." Throughout his life Sanborn was always trying to organize one group or another.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to being afraid of arrest and censorious of those who disagreed with his refusal to testify (they were all "wholly crazy," "extravagant," or "blockheads"), Sanborn now became as concerned about his public reputation as had Howe. He wanted to avoid jail and maintain the respect of

those who applauded his efforts for Brown. To do so, he wrote the one man who would most likely criticize his behavior--Thomas Wentworth Higginson. In the letter to Higginson, written only a few days after arriving in Canada, Sanborn claimed he would have been "glad to give Massachusetts a chance to keep her citizens at home" but didn't "have much faith in her people in the capacity of defenders against the law." Indeed, the "keeping back of evidence" was much "too important to leave to chance." Without testimony, Sanborn was certain "no new light could be thrown on the matter." The South would exaggerate the raid and the North would extenuate it. The committee secretary also believed the North's silence would very likely foster similar schemes and he claimed he wanted to "reserve" himself for that time. A few weeks before he had attempted to alleviate Howe's guilt in order to keep the doctor in Canada but now he tried to create guilt. At the end of his letter to Higginson, Sanborn criticized the minister for "rushing upon" his friends and implied that any harsh words about his flight to Canada would not do. Sanborn also pleaded with Higginson. He "implored" the minister not to tell what he knew to the "enemies of the cause."<sup>11</sup>

The meeting with Wilson and his eventual summons drove Sanborn to Canada, but they had a far different effect on Samuel Gridley Howe. The doctor stood by his decision to go to Washington. He was through running and through taking

Sanborn's advice. Henry Wilson wanted to use the hearings to exonerate himself and the Republican Party and Howe wanted to use them to recapture the civic reputation he believed he had lost. A few years earlier, in the midst of a crisis of character, the doctor had admitted his feelings of cowardliness in "dangerous situations" but at the time he also remarked that he was proud of his ability to seem "cool" in such instances. Between October 16 and December 24, 1859, he had failed even to act coolly. He had failed to maintain a calm demeanor for public consumption and he was deeply embarrassed. His concern for what "one or the other may think" and his worries about lost "public approbation" far outweighed his fears of arrest. He had once been wary about being lured into prison if he set foot in Washington. Now he wanted to go there, correct his "misteps," set himself "in rectus curia," and "express the admiration and respect" he felt for John Brown.<sup>12</sup>

But if Howe wanted to redeem his reputation, he was decidedly against fully revealing his true relationship with Brown. He wanted to exonerate himself, avoid imprisonment, and "express his admiration" for Brown but he intended to divorce himself from the warrior's "special purposes." He would claim that his hands and those of other abolitionists who supported Brown were "clean." He intended to use Massachusetts Kansas Committee records to prove this contention before a public tribunal. And obviously, he never

thought of mentioning the Secret Committee of Six. If questions were asked about the arms distributed by Massachusetts Kansas he would claim that the arms were only to be used as the subscribers intended. Stearns had instructed Brown about this but the warrior had disobeyed orders. Howe also thought of suggesting that Brown was "already tete exalte: not mad but intensified to the verge of madness." This monomania took "the form of the love of arms," but these weapons "had only been entrusted to him for the defense of Kansas."<sup>13</sup>

Howe also stood by his decision to testify because he had begun to hear stories from Washington that cast some doubt on James Mason's willingness to fully document conspiracy. The doctor reflected this information in a letter to Charles Sumner in mid-January. Howe said he wanted to "clear up" the matter of his relationship to Brown but was certain that by the time he testified Mason would "have got so much of what he did not want that he will hardly press me into service." And to make sure this was the case, Howe asked that the date of his testimony be moved from January 24 to the first week in February. The more Mason heard the depth of support for Brown, the less likely he was to pressure those most closely associated with the martyr. Thus, with evidence assembled to dissociate himself from Brown's "special purposes," a strong possibility Mason didn't want to document the conspiracy anyway, and the assurances of Sumner and Wilson that he need not fear coming to Washington, Howe

was prepared to correct his "misteps." He was relieved with his decision to go on; relieved that he had stopped yielding "too much to others." The thought of evading testimony was always "repugnant" to him though he admitted having some misgivings about a trap when he was first notified of the committee's formation. Now he wanted to stand boldly before the Senate investigators.<sup>14</sup>

One man in Massachusetts watched Howe's new found boldness with curiosity, confusion, and a bit of disgust. In fact, Thomas Wentworth Higginson was so upset with the actions of Howe, Sanborn, and Stearns that he refused to "expostulate" on their motives anymore. In November, long before the Mason Committee was set up, Higginson had decided not to volunteer testimony because, even though he did not fear proclaiming his relationship to Brown, he was worried about implicating other secret committee members. Now he saw that none of the other members were hindered by such consideration for him. Each had offered their "own confession" on their "own terms," after urging him to hold back evidence. The minister wondered what Sanborn hoped to accomplish by running to Canada or what Howe felt he would prove by consenting to testify after twice flying there. Howe and Stearns couldn't accomplish a thing by going in front of investigators who didn't want to thoroughly probe the alleged conspiracy. Higginson had recently discussed the matter with Vermont's Senator Jacob Collamer and knew, as he was sure

Howe did, that Mason's determination to uncover wrong doing was beginning to weaken. According to Collamer, all the Virginia Senator wanted to do was claim he had tried to expose the conspiracy but had failed because he "could not obtain the necessary information." Collamer speculated that Mason took this new approach to the investigation because he was very fearful of "the effect on the country of witnesses who shall defend John Brown."<sup>15</sup>

Higginson suspected that personal considerations fully controlled the actions of his less than honorable confederates and he was deeply offended. Previously he had criticized all of them for a lack of physical courage while conceding their moral courage. But he wasn't sure of even that anymore. The only thing he was certain of was why he had not been called to the Mason hearings. He had always openly refused to go to Canada and refused to disavow his support of Brown. If Collamer was correct, the committee chairman wasn't willing to take a chance on examining a witness willing to speak the whole truth.

Jacob Collamer's comments to Higginson about James Mason's fears were astute. The Virginia Senator was worried that popular emotions would be inflamed by men willing to defend Brown. Still, he had not always been afraid of such a result. As early as October 21, only two days after the discovery of documents hinting at the possibility of an organization behind Brown's raid, James Mason had been eager to

start a thorough-going investigation. He felt enough evidence existed to warrant belief in conspiracy and was determined to expose it. Mason knew Brown "acted from the impression made upon him by abolitionist tracts," which implied that all one had to do was put arms in the reach of slaves to incite immediate insurrection. The Virginian wanted an inquiry made to discover the source of funds for this "military expedition." By mid-December, 1859, Mason had his wish. He was appointed chairman of a special Senate committee charged with examining the Harpers Ferry incident. And he was empowered to ask questions which bore directly on the issue of conspiracy. Mason and his fellow committeemen, J. N. Fitch, Jefferson Davis, J. R. Doolittle, and Jacob Collamer were asked to find out whether or not Brown worked with any organization which "intended to subvert the government of any of the states," whether any citizen of the United States was implicated as an "accessory to [the raid] by contributions of money, arms, munitions or otherwise," and what the character of such an organization might be if it did exist.<sup>16</sup>

Mason's intense initial desire to prove conspiracy dismayed Brown's Boston friends. At first it seemed to them that their only hope for sympathy lay with the two Republican's on the committee, J. R. Doolittle, and Jacob Collamer. Collamer's attitude toward the whole investigation was particularly heartening and best exemplified by his statements



to A. A. Lawrence in late December. The Vermont Senator was certain that any "fair investigation" would show that the number of Brown's accomplices, beyond those caught at Harpers Ferry, was "extremely small." Collamer seriously doubted whether anyone who contributed to Brown "knew his purpose to be of the criminal proportions and insane expedition it turned out." Though the Senator was very disturbed by people furnishing arms "to carry violence into the Slavery States" and he termed such acts as "criminal," his hints were obvious. The committee lacked enough evidence to build its case, Brown was dead, and those called to the witness stand would really be in charge of the direction of the investigation. If they handled themselves properly, the inquiry might prove to be a blessing in disguise. They (Brown's supporters) could prove that the warrior had not received arms "for the purposes to which they were eventually put." The hearings could exonerate as well as implicate.<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, in view of the respective positions taken by Mason and Collamer previous to the actual hearings, one of Brown's friends, George Luther Stearns, found he had more to fear from the Vermont sympathizer than the Virginia enemy. Mason developed misgivings about the investigation's potential impact as a catalyst for northern antislavery sentiment, and slowly moved away from his commitment to fully expose conspiracy. On the other hand, Collamer, by the time he interrogated Stearns, began to sense that Brown's Boston

supporters might not have been as ignorant of the warrior's "criminal" intent as he had originally supposed. Collamer would end up pressing witnesses to speak fully and truthfully about their attitude toward Brown and his violent acts. And at times, it seemed he was much more concerned about the possibility of conspiracy than Mason had originally been. Mason pressured witnesses--but never too much. Collamer defended them--but not entirely. Mason was never a lion nor Collamer a lamb.

### III

When subpoenas went out in early January some men refused to comply. Gerrit Smith, James Repath, Hugh Forbes, Frank Sanborn, and John Brown, Jr., would not go to Washington and testify for one reason or another. The younger Brown also used the occasion to dissociate himself from certain of his father's supporters. John Jr. claimed he would not appear to testify but also let it be known that his "business" didn't call him to Canada. If he visited that temporary home for "American exiles," it would be from "other considerations than personal safety." Most men subpoenaed by the Mason Committee, however, did consent to make an appearance. Throughout late January, February, and early March, they paraded through the hearing room and answered numerous questions about their knowledge of Brown, his antislavery activities, and his Harpers Ferry plans.<sup>18</sup>

When Henry Wilson was asked about his relationship with Brown, he answered by describing Hugh Forbes' revelations, discussing his exchange of letters with Howe, speaking of his own (and the Republican Party's) disdain for violence and documenting this position by telling the committee of his confrontation with Brown at the Parker House the previous spring. John Andrew was asked why he didn't defend Brown during his trial. Andrew answered that as a Republican, a Massachusetts man and abolitionist he would have been on trial quite as much as his client. He was also unfamiliar with Virginia jurisprudence. Andrew's testimony is also significant because it represents the basic defense agreed upon by Brown's Boston supporters in meetings held previous to their testimony. Andrew emphasized what most impressed him about Brown, as well as what he thought would enhance the dead warrior's reputation in the eyes of northern people. At the same time, he depicted Brown as one who would never have shared his Harpers Ferry plan with anyone. Who was John Brown? According to this abolitionist lawyer, Brown was a controlled enthusiast, one who spoke in tones "perfectly level without emphasis and exultation of feeling." Brown was a paragon of those virtues that Andrew, and the secret committee membership saw as a necessary component of the American character. The warrior represented those mainstream values which would bring order to the chaos of mid-nineteenth America. He personified the values they imagined could bring

a return to the halcyon days of eighteenth-century revolutionary America. In a time when the corporation had begun to nudge the rugged individualist off the stage, Brown was a man who "scarcely regarded other people," who was entirely "self-possessed and unto himself." He "appeared to have no emotion of any sort but to be entirely absorbed in an idea." Ironically, Andrew and the others had romanticized a product of the very socio-economic reality that appalled them.<sup>19</sup>

As suggested, Andrew's testimony continued the theme of secrecy originally begun by Brown's Kansas associate, Richard Realf. In testimony given on January 21, Realf, who had participated in Boston meetings intended to orchestrate the statements of all those who were summoned, denied knowledge of where Brown had procured funds for his venture. He claimed Brown was cautious and uncommunicative about the particulars of his plan. Brown didn't trust anyone with anything more than what was "barely sufficient" to "secure cooperation and support." Realf did admit that Brown told him Gerrit Smith "promised to assist him in his further enterprises against slavery." But Realf did not know if this meant assistance against the South.<sup>20</sup>

On January 11 Samuel Gridley Howe was summoned to appear before the committee thirteen days later. But the doctor asked to postpone his testimony until the first week of February claiming he had previously scheduled an exhibition of blind children before the Canadian Parliament, which was

considering an appropriation for rehabilitation institutions similar to Perkins School. Howe also wanted to see how the investigation was proceeding before he subjected himself to questioning. He had met with Realf, Stearns, Andrew, and Wilson and knew what they would say, but he did not want to be surprised by the unexpected. The more testimony given, the better his chance to avoid surprise. Howe's postponement request was approved and he was resummoned for early February.<sup>21</sup>

From the outset of his testimony, Howe moved quickly to close the door on any effort to link him to Brown. To Mason's question about who controlled guns purchased by Massachusetts for Kansas, he replied that he could not answer "with precision." From that moment on, he qualified his answers by claiming that he could "not recall," or had "no definite knowledge of" or "could not say for certain." Asked how Brown regained possession of weapons supposedly confiscated by the Massachusetts Kansas Committee in May, 1858, the doctor deftly noted that he had "no means of knowing" that the arms used at Harpers Ferry were the same donated for Brown's defense of Kansas. Unsatisfied with this reply, Mason asked Howe to produce letters which proved that Brown was given the guns only for defensive purposes in Kansas. Howe balked and claimed he could only speak for himself. Correspondence with Brown was the responsibility of the committee chairman, George Luther Stearns. Howe admitted that

he saw Brown in the spring of 1858, but said that Brown "gave no definite information" about his plans. When Collamer interjected and asked Howe what he meant when he suggested that Brown sought arms and funds for the "defense of Freedom in Kansas," the physician answered revealingly. Howe asserted that when Brown used such terms he (the doctor) had no thought about "anything but the freedom of Kansas, as such, without any thought of colored men at all." Further on in the questioning, Collamer returned to the issue of Brown's plans in 1858 and the funds he collected in Boston during that spring. Again Howe hedged. Brown gave him "no definite statement of any plan or purpose." The warrior only appealed to him as an antislavery man.<sup>22</sup>

Up until that point in the testimony the committee had no evidence to dispute Howe's vague denials. When it came to questioning him about his relationship to Brown in 1859, however, the doctor found himself under more pressure. The committeemen had enough evidence partially to rebut his denials and they proceeded to rattle the forgetful physician. What is more, Collamer started to suspect that Howe and the other men who supported Brown had taken no clear stand against the warrior when he advocated the use of violence. Collamer began a series of questions about 1859 by asking Howe to comment on a note found at Chambersburg. It read: "Dear Friend, Our friend from Concord called with your note. I

began the investment with fifty dollars enclosed and will try to do more through friends. Doctor."

Collamer: Will you say to whom it was addressed?

Howe: I presume it was addressed to Captain Brown.

Collamer: Do you remember the fact of time?

Howe: I do not remember the time.<sup>23</sup>

James Mason was disturbed by Howe's failure to answer the question and so prodded the doctor by asking him if he recalled sending a telegraphic dispatch to John Kagi, a friend of Brown's in June, 1859.

Mason: Will you be good enough to inform the committee whether you were acquainted with a man named J. H. Kagi?

Howe: I never saw him.

Mason: Did you have any correspondence with him?

Howe: I never corresponded with him that I recollect.

Mason then exhibited the telegram sent by Howe to Kagi on June 6, 1859 which read: "He got the needful and left three days ago, direction unknown. S.G.H."

Mason: Will you say if you have any recall of this telegraphic dispatch?

Howe: I have not the slightest idea.<sup>24</sup>

Howe was then questioned about a note John Brown, Jr., sent to John Kagi on August 17, 1859 after his Boston visit. The note read: "First called on Dr. H- though I had no letter of introduction he received me cordially. He gave me a letter to a friend who does business on Milk Street. Went with him to his house in Medford and took dinner. The last word he said to me was, 'Tell friend (Issac) that we have the fullest confidence in his endeavor, whatever may be the result'."

Mason: Did he tell you the object of his visit?

Howe: He did not.

Mason: Did he apply to you for money?

Howe: He did not.

Mason: Did you learn it [the object of his visit] from any other source?

Howe: I did not.<sup>25</sup>

After Howe admitted that he gave money to Brown in 1857 and 1858 but that he did not know "what disposition" was made of the funds, Collamer interjected.

Collamer: To prevent any misunderstanding about these contributions I desire to ask a question. Were not the contributions received by the committies which were made by the people of Boston and Massachusetts for and during the Kansas troubles?



Howe: For that definite purpose.

Collamer: Was any money of these contributions ever sent to Brown in 1858?

Howe: Not that I know of.

Mason: But there were other contributions that were sent to him after the fall of 1858 . . . to be used at his discretion.

Howe: I had personal knowledge of several small sums.

Mason: What were the limits imposed on his discretion?

Howe: No further than the confidence he inspired among his friends by two opinions entertained by him, one of which was that he was opposed to promoting insurrection among slaves, and another that he was opposed to shedding human blood except in self-defense.

Mason: Do you know of any plan he had . . . for . . . promoting insurrection?

Howe: I know of no definite plan; he was secretive.

Doolittle: In all your conversation or communication with Brown had you ever . . . any intimation . . . of an organized effort, on his part, to produce an insurrection among slaves?

Howe: Never.<sup>26</sup>

Most certainly the committee members--Democratic and Republican--were not pleased with Howe's vague and negative

responses. Yet they dismissed him after he answered Doolittle's question because they realized they did not have enough evidence to fully contravert his story. It is also possible they believed more information could be obtained from the one individual in charge of Massachusetts Kansas Committee funds, namely, George Luther Stearns.

In mid-January, while the first sessions of the Mason Committee were being held, Stearns traveled to North Elba to visit the Brown family. He wanted to assure them that Massachusetts abolitionists would continue their financial assistance. At the same time he presented the family with funds already contributed for their support. Stearns also inquired as to the possibility of Ann Brown attending Franklin Sanborn's school at Concord tuition-free. While in North Elba, he mentioned his forthcoming testimony but claimed not to be worried about it. Like Samuel Gridley Howe, the Medford businessman knew that if he was able to maintain his composure during questioning nothing illegal could be proved against him. The evidence in the committee's possession was scanty and inconclusive. Only his own admission of guilt would give investigators enough material to recommend prosecution. And Stearns wasn't about to make that kind of slip. He carefully prepared an opening statement for the committee, attended meetings with Howe and others in order to coordinate his story with theirs, and closely followed the committee proceedings in the newspapers. When he

returned home from North Elba he found his summons waiting. He was to appear on February 24 before Mason, Collamer, and the others.<sup>27</sup>

Stearns began his testimony by reading the prepared statement about his relations with John Brown. In it he claimed to have known nothing about the Brown's Chatham meetings or the remarks attributed to him by John Brown, Jr., after their August meeting. The younger Brown's visit to his Medford home was only a pleasure call. No money was given for his father's use. Stearns also reiterated the theme which echoed through all previous discussions of Brown by those testifying: he never knew much of John Brown's plans because of the warrior's extreme secretiveness. Brown repeatedly told Stearns that "it was the worst possible policy for a man to reveal his plans." Surprisingly, Stearns did admit to having had contact with Francis Merriam, but only after the raid. The Medford businessman stated that while he was in Canada during December, Merriam came to his hotel room and introduced himself as a "Mr. Lockwood." Merriam tried to discuss Harpers Ferry, but Stearns promptly cut him off by saying that he was "very busy and could not attend him."<sup>28</sup>

Having finished his statement Stearns began his questioning. Mason asked him whether or not it was true that he attempted to claim the weapons taken from Brown during his capture. Stearns denied having done so, saying that he

presumed "in the confusion of Harpers Ferry everything was distributed." Stearns did admit that George Sennot came to him and asked what was to be done with the recovered equipment. At the same time Sennot exhibited a letter from Brown authorizing him (Sennot) to take possession of the property for the benefit of the Brown family.<sup>29</sup>

Like Howe, Stearns never gave his questioners much satisfaction. He could deny knowledge of Brown's plans, deny knowledge of funds being raised to support insurrection and he never had to worry about rebuttal. Circumstantial evidence like John Brown, Jr.'s letter pointed to Stearns' assistance of Brown and indicated he knew more than he admitted. But the committee lacked the will and direct evidence to establish such a connection convincingly. Indeed, Stearns handled himself with relative ease before their barrage of questions. He almost began to relax. But it was the confidence he gained in dealing with Mason, G. N. Fitch, and Jefferson Davis, that led him to make an unintended admission to the increasingly suspicious Collamer.

Collamer: Did you at any time before the transaction at Harpers Ferry, in any way directly or indirectly, understand that there was any purpose on the part of Brown to make an in road upon the subject of slavery in any of the states?

Stearns: No sir . . . I did not suppose he had any organized plan.

Collamer: My idea is, making any forcible entry upon Virginia, or any other state.

Stearns: No sir.

Collamer: Had you ever any intimation of that kind, any idea of it?

Stearns: No Sir. Perhaps I do not understand you. I did suppose he would go into Virginia . . . and relieve slaves.

Collamer: In what way?

Stearns: In any way he could, give them liberty.

Collamer: Did you understand he contemplated doing it by force?

Stearns: Yes sir, by force if necessary.

Collamer (testily): Will you explain in what manner by force you understood he contemplated doing it?

Stearns (realizing his mistake and becoming a bit flustered): I cannot explain any manner because . . . I never talked with him on the subject.

Collamer (in heated tones): Had you any idea that these arms were to be used for any such purpose as making an inroad into any State?

Stearns (upset by Collamers display of anger): I think I do not understand you.

Collamer (angrily): John Brown has made an inroad into Virginia, with force and arms to relieve slaves; you understand that!

Stearns: Yes sir.

Collamer: Now, did you ever before that took place, have any intimation that that was . . . intended . . . by him?

Stearns: No sir. I never supposed that he contemplated anything like what occurred at Harpers Ferry.

Collamer: Then I ask you do you disapprove of such a transaction as that at Harpers Ferry?

Stearns: I should have disapproved of it if I had known it.<sup>30</sup>

Despite his previous admission that Brown contemplated the use of force, Stearns' final denial of Brown satisfied Collamer enough to end his questioning. Undoubtedly, the Vermont Senator no longer saw the inquiry as a way to exonerate Brown's Massachusetts supporters. Collamer learned too much during the hearings to continue holding that view. Yet like his committee colleagues Collamer was handicapped by a lack of substantial factual evidence to support any further action against certain witnesses. He knew it and Brown's Boston friends knew it. They had come to Washington believing there was very little chance a case could be made against them. And they were right. Stearns, like those who preceded him, was dismissed from the witness stand only superficially bruised by the experience.

As he traveled back to Boston, Stearns realized that he was just as nervous and concerned about the way in which the Massachusetts public would react to his Mason Committee performance as he had ever been about going to Washington to give that performance. He had denied Brown and claimed to disapprove of his tactics before the Senate investigators. Now he returned home to face all the men and women he had boldly defended Brown to in the months leading up to Harpers Ferry. He wondered if they would condemn him as a hypocrite and desperately hoped they would be satisfied with his testimony. When he arrived in Medford he was a bit surprised to find that people were not only satisfied with his testimony but also praised him heartily for his "bold speech." This reaction convinced him that Harpers Ferry had sunk "deep into the hearts of our people" and would greatly influence forthcoming elections.<sup>31</sup>

Undoubtably, George Luther Stearns was also thankful he had had the wit to make certain additions to his Mason Committee testimony after that testimony had ended. As has been suggested, Stearns was fearful of defending Brown once he had inadvertantly admitted that he knew Brown contemplated the use of force. He answered Collamer's most important question by asserting that he would not have approved of the Harpers Ferry scheme if he had known of it in advance. But when Stearns completed his testimony and all of the committeemen (except Mason) left the hearing room, the Medford

businessman asked the committee stenographer if he would add another sentence to that answer. Stearns now claimed that disapproval of Brown's act had only been his first reaction and that since then he had "changed" his opinion. In his addenda Stearns claimed that instead of disapproving of the raid had he known of it, he now believed John Brown to be the "most representative man of this century" and regarded Harpers Ferry as an event that would free America. Mason just smiled as Stearns added the statement and left the room. Once home, Stearns was relieved to find that all newspaper accounts of his testimony included the addenda. He had expunged his most blatant denial of the warrior and it actually looked as if he had made the firmest commitment to Brown of all those who testified.<sup>32</sup>

Samuel Gridley Howe was also concerned with public reaction to his testimony. After all, he went to Washington primarily to set himself "in rectus curia," to correct "misteps," and recapture public "approbation." Howe was particularly hopeful that his testimony would dissolve the animosity of Thomas Wentworth Higginson. And when the doctor came home from Washington, he continued efforts to rehabilitate himself with the minister. Howe wrote Higginson and told him that when Brown had been in Boston the previous spring the two of them had argued about the morality of stealing slaveholders' property during slave rescue efforts. As a result of this disagreement, Howe claimed that he and Brown had no



conversation about his future plans. Brown's appearance at Harpers Ferry was "astonishing" to the doctor. Howe did have some trouble trying to explain why he sent money to Brown in September 1859 and how he knew where to send it. Howe said he sent funds only to show sympathy for the warrior but did so "without cognizance of his purposes." Howe did admit to something he failed to say before the Mason Committee. He told Higginson that if he had known that Brown intended to steal nothing but slaves he would have given "aid and encouragement" to the warrior. Unquestionably, Higginson wondered how the doctor managed to avoid discussion of Brown's plan during his numerous conversations with Sanborn and Stearns between June and October. Was it possible Howe sent the money to Chambersburg without knowing of its proximity to Harpers Ferry? Was it possible that Howe didn't know of Sanborn's and Stearns' all-night meeting with Francis Merriam? Higginson hardly thought so. The minister wondered if Howe seriously believed he could divorce himself from Brown's "special purposes."<sup>33</sup>

Howe tried to be recondite about the disclaimer card. He told Higginson it would not have been published if the two of them had been able to speak to each other before it was submitted to the newspapers. Howe claimed that he doubted the "expediency" of the card all along. But he had shown it to "an honorable man" who "knew about Brown's movements and a great deal more" and that man had approved of it. So Howe

submitted the card. At the end of his letter Howe returned to his introductory theme. He told Higginson that he had assisted Brown with his plans because he had "confidence" in the old warrior but claimed he never expected "anything like what happened or anything more than a stampede."<sup>34</sup>

It is doubtful that Higginson's attitude toward Howe was changed by the letter. None of the members of the secret committee expected what had happened at Harpers Ferry. For one thing, Brown wasn't supposed to get caught in the arsenal. The warrior had hoped to obtain additional weapons there but did not expect to get trapped inside. All committee members were stunned by that occurrence, so Howe could not separate himself from the project by claiming that Brown's entrapment surprised him. Nor could Howe get away from his role in the whole affair by claiming he only expected "a stampede" and no violence. They all expected a stampede but they were also prepared for the shedding of blood if that was necessary to make the stampede a success. Maybe Howe did argue with Brown about stealing slaveholders' property but Higginson remembered that at the time of the Missouri raid a year earlier, Howe had accepted the death of a white slaveholder without comment. Howe accepted Parker's estimate of the episode and was more than willing to trade one white life for that of eleven slaves. No, Howe could not remove himself from responsibility for Brown's acts in the eyes of Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

## IV

When Sameul Gridley Howe and George Luther Stearns met after the hearings both agreed that the investigation had been conducted "unskillfully." They had not had to make incriminating revelations because the questions had been poorly conceived. Actually, the failure of the committee to uncover conspiracy had nothing to do with a lack of skill. It resulted from a combination of half-truthful answers, a minimum of evidence, Mason's reluctance to fully establish conspiracy and Collamer's initial wish that the hearings exonerate all those called to testify. These factors and not poorly conceived questions produced a less-than-probing analysis of the money and men behind John Brown. When the committee's report was issued in June of 1860, these elements were reflected on virtually every page of the testimony.<sup>35</sup>

Mason's misgivings are particularly noticeable in the majority report of the investigation. Mason concluded that Brown's purpose in Kansas was to keep the public mind inflamed on the subject of slavery "with a view to effecting such organization as might enable him to bring about servile insurrection in the slave states." Mason stressed that testimony before his committee indicated the "utter insecurity of peace and safety, in some states of the Union, in the existing condition of the public mind and its purposes in the non-slaveholding States." He was convinced that northern

public opinion was like a tinderbox and could easily be set off by the committee hearings. This view is pervasive in the majority report. Despite obvious flaws in the testimony of Howe and Stearns, despite Realf's implication of Smith, and despite the refusal of certain associates of Brown to testify, the report carefully avoided any accusation of direct complicity with Brown. Admittedly the committee lacked the necessary hard evidence to make a direct accusation of wrongdoing but what evidence did exist the chairman handled in a remarkably subdued fashion.<sup>36</sup>

On the whole issue of accessories "not present" who might have given Brown arms, money or munitions, the majority report held that it appeared such contributions were not made with "actual knowledge of use for which they were intended by Brown." Money was freely contributed by those who considered themselves Brown's friends "without inquiry" about how it was to be used. Mason accepted the conspirators' own definition of the way Brown obtained funds. By doing so, he walled them away from the very thing he suspected: that they believed in the appropriateness of violent means to end slavery. Mason described Brown as one who "successfully impressed himself and his capacity . . . upon the sickly . . . depraved sensibilities of his allies." In the process, Brown commanded their confidence "if he did not altogether bill their suspicions."<sup>37</sup>

Mason's analysis was not an "unskillful" one. Indeed, anyone who reads the report can easily recognize it as a piece of master craftsmanship. At once, the Virginia Senator implied a full understanding of how and why the conspiracy took place. Yet he succeeded in doing the same thing to the general public that the conspirators tried to do to him. In the report he successfully obscured the relationships of Brown and his supporters so as to prevent the public from becoming fully aware of their tacit recognition of the principles of justified violence. Mason accepted statements about Brown's "remarkable retinence" and his "secretiveness" not so much because he believed that this was the case, but because he hoped to turn these claims to his own advantage. Brown's friends might escape prosecution by pleading that they were not fully informed of his intentions but Mason then used the same argument to prove they did not fully condone Brown's acts at Harpers Ferry. Mason hoped to conceal precisely the same thing Brown's conspirators did. Mason wanted to demonstrate that men who supported Brown did so out of a "lack of knowledge" and not because they believed in the "cause of insurrection." There was no need to suggest legislation on the matter because the invasion was "simply the act of lawless ruffians under the sanction of no public or political authority." Mason beat Howe and Stearns at their own game.<sup>38</sup>

In their minority report, Collamer and Doolittle were less interested than Mason in portraying Brown's act as one of "lawless ruffians." Consequently they tended to focus more attention on Brown's friends. In the end the minority report came down much harder on Brown's supporters than the majority report did. Both Senators Doolittle and Collamer accepted the premise that Brown's Boston friends "placed too much implicit confidence in him." But while they saw no conclusive evidence of conspiracy, they were appalled by the Bostonians' tacit acquiescence in the use of violence. They believed it was "astonishing" that there should "still be found large bodies of men laboring under the infatuation that . . . a good object can be affected by lawlessness and violence."<sup>39</sup>

V

Thomas Wentworth Higginson ended his immediate relationship to the Harpers Ferry episode when he decided not to proceed with his rescue scheme. Gerrit Smith severed his attachment to the affair by being committed to the Utica Asylum. When the Mason Report was published in the late spring of 1860, it officially ended Howe's and Stearns' connection with the Brown effort--although they considered February's testimony as the termination date. In the first week of April, 1860, Frank Sanborn came full circle.

Early in the evening of April 3 a group of deputies under the direction of Silas Carlton rode into Concord, inquired where the young committee secretary lived, deployed themselves around his home on Sudbury Road, and then quietly waited until darkness enveloped the town. At about nine o'clock, Carlton accompanied by five deputies walked up the front steps of Sanborn's home and knocked on the door. When Sanborn answered, he was informed that Carlton had been deputized by the sergeant-at-arms of the United States Senate, Dunning R. McNair, to arrest him for failure to heed a Mason Committee summons. Carlton and his men then burst into the house, grabbed Sanborn and began pulling him toward their carriage in the road. Sanborn struggled violently against the group, first pinning his long legs against the doorway, then hooking them on the railing of the front porch. As he struggled, he called to his sister Sarah, told her he was being arrested without warrant, and asked her to warn the neighbors. Sarah ran from the house screaming. She managed to awaken a friend named Colonel Whiting and then returned to her front yard where Frank was still struggling against Carlton and the others. Sarah ran to the deputy's carriage, grabbed the whip, cracked it, and sent the horses bolting off down the street.<sup>40</sup>

The enormous commotion caused by the arrest attempt woke people in the area. Colonel Whiting and many others came out of their homes to see what was happening and soon found

themselves grappling with the deputies in an effort to release Sanborn. John Keyes had the presence of mind to run to the nearby home of Judge Rockwell Hoar, obtain a writ of habeus corpus and then seek out the town constable, John Moore. When Moore and Keyes arrived at the scene, they temporarily called a halt to the melee and tried to discuss the situation with Carlton. Moore asked Carlton on what authority he was arresting Sanborn. Carlton told Moore he had been deputized by McNair. Moore then showed Carlton the writ and asked him to give Sanborn up. When Carlton refused, Moore deputized the Concord residents who were present and asked them to take Sanborn into custody. During the night of protective custody he spent at George Precott's home, the secretary hastily penned an open letter to the Massachusetts legislature censuring that body for allowing laws to persist which encouraged the "kidnapping" of "white men" by federal authorities.<sup>41</sup>

Early the next morning, Sanborn traveled to Boston where a hearing had been called in the chambers of the Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Court--Lemuel Shaw. Appearing with lawyers Robert Treat Paine, Samuel Sewall, and John Andrew, Sanborn patiently endured the legal arguments and then waited for Shaw's decision. Shaw did not feel Sanborn should be taken to Washington. In his ruling, he refused to challenge the constitutionality of the law of 1846 or the inherent right of a congressional committee to arrest witnesses who



had disregarded a summons. But Shaw based his decision against the government on the premise that "the warrant returned the power to arrest the respondent in terms limited to McNair . . . and could not be executed by a deputy." In short, McNair could not legally delegate the authority to arrest Sanborn. The young secretary was free.<sup>42</sup>

During the hearing a large crowd gathered outside the Court House. George Luther Stearns, fearing an unpleasant confrontation when his young friend left Shaw's chambers, had a carriage waiting by a side door of the building. When the hearing ended he hustled Sanborn to the carriage and the two of them then rode out to Concord. Upon arriving in Concord, Sanborn was greeted by a cheering crowd and saluted by a cannon. He also watched people scream insults at Colonel Joseph Holbrook and Postmaster Charles Davis, the two townsmen who provided information to Carlton the night before. Soon Sanborn learned that a town meeting had been called in his honor. That evening he was to share the platform with Emerson, Thoreau, and Higginson. In less than twenty-four hours he had been arrested, tried, found innocent and made Concord's "hero of the hour." He was dazed and overwhelmed.<sup>43</sup>

At eight o'clock that evening his moment of triumph began. He strode briskly to the speakers platform, thanked Emerson and Thoreau for their introductory remarks, turned to the assemblage, and launched into a brief but dramatic tirade against the Slave Power. Sanborn started by describing the

arrest attempt. He then acknowledged the heroic efforts of those who assisted him and spoke of Shaw's decision. Sanborn firmly believed the decision "agreed with the sentiments of two-thirds of the people of Massachusetts." Then he lashed out at the men who tried to arrest him. They were "ruffians." Furthermore, he was convinced that, had they been killed during the rescue, the deed would not have been judged unlawful. In fact, Sanborn said he believed the deputies "ought to have been killed." Finally, in a dramatic gesture, Sanborn held up the handcuffs used to bind him during the arrest attempt. He asked the crowd what they symbolized. "Tyranny!" came the resounding cry. Sanborn had learned many lessons during the course of his relationship with Brown. He showed Francis Merriam one of them in early October. And, now, Concord was receiving a demonstration of another.<sup>44</sup>

After holding the handcuffs aloft, Sanborn continued to whip the emotions of the crowd. Dealing with southerners was like "dealing with demons." Slavery had to be opposed by force. But, as always, Sanborn was careful not to go too far. He did not counsel attacking slavery. Rather, he suggested that northerners prepare to meet the encroachments of slavery with force because that was the "only argument some people can understand." Sanborn then concluded his remarks with a Brown-like nod to the Almighty and to practical abolition. He swore that "so help him God" he would "put in practice the teachings of the last twenty-four hours." The

secret committeeman received a tremendous ovation, waved to the audience, walked off the platform, and strode out of the building into the cool night air. He was much too excited to listen to the remaining speakers and undoubtedly he realized that he might never receive such a powerful acclamation of popular favor again. It was something to be savored in solitude.<sup>45</sup>

The kidnap incident and Sanborn's reaction to it suggest a good deal about his motives for committing himself to full-time work in the abolitionist movement and for attaching himself to John Brown. From the time he first moved to Concord in the spring of 1855 Sanborn felt alone; estranged from the community. Of course, he had his schoolteaching, Sarah's company, and a superficial acquaintance with some of the famous personages of the town. But these things did not sustain him; did not create in him a feeling of acceptance. Indeed, he was somewhat dismayed by the aloofness of both Emerson and Thoreau. They liked him but kept their distance. For all of Sanborn's transcendental ardor, he could not make the famous men and women of Concord his intimates. At the same time, his identification with these men and women closed him off from the rest of Concord's citizenry. As he noted years later, in peaceable times the "Concord majority sided with itself and did not approve of people like abolitionists and Transcendentalists who would turn the world upside down." This Concord majority disliked the "enemies of constituted

authorities" and turned "all the weapons of exhortation, gossip and Pharisiac aloofness" against them. So there he was, a schoolteacher and second generation transcendentalist, spurned by the Concord majority and not yet fully sustained or accepted by those he longed to emulate. Even during the six months after Harpers Ferry, when he received repeated hints that he would be protected by the community, Sanborn did not fully trust in Concord's citizens. Then, in little over a day, he had experienced a dramatic and intoxicating alternation of his status. He had been rescued, feted, saluted by cannon, and rhapsodized by men whose intimate friendship he had so long and vainly sought. The "people" had "defended" him and "vowed" to protect him.<sup>46</sup>

In the next few days the young man had a chance to reflect on his new found station. He decided to write to Theodore Parker about it. In the letter Sanborn strained to define the essential meaning of the whole episode. He managed to do so in two crucial and revealing sentences. Sanborn told Parker that "everything is going on favorably for me as it can." The tyranny of "the other side has put all good citizens with me of all parties." The kidnap attempt and, by indirection, his relationship to abolition and Brown had won him acceptance. He was, as he noted years later, made "popular in quarters where I was not known before." Frank Sanborn, the bright young son of a New Hampshire clerk, who found that a Harvard education did not

automatically provide one with a niche in Boston society, had finally found his place.<sup>47</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

## Introduction

- 1 Oswald Garrison Villard, John Brown, 1800-1959: A Biography Fifty Years After (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 271-591; Stephen B. Oates, To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970), 181-353; These two works examine the conspiracy most thoroughly.
- 2 J. C. Furnas, The Road to Harpers Ferry (New York: Wm. Sloane Associates, 1959), 327, 330-331, 334.
- 3 Ibid., 335-336, 339, 344-347, 349-352, 354, 365-367, 329-330, 378.
- 4 Ibid., 378; Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln, Vol. II, Prologue to Civil War, 1859-1861 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 21.
- 5 Villard, Brown, 274-321, 333, 271-272, 588-589.
- 6 Ralph V. Harlow, Gerrit Smith, Philanthropist and Reformer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1936), 308, 363; Henry Steele Commager, Theodore Parker, Yankee Crusader (1st paperback edition; Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 250-251.
- 7 Commager, Parker, 250-251, 253; C. Vann Woodward, "John Brown's Private War," in The Burden of Southern History (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 51.
- 8 Harlow, Smith, 336-337.
- 9 Harold Schwartz, Samuel Gridley Howe: Social Reformer, 1801-1876 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 238-239, 248, 221-223, 219-220.
- 10 Ibid., 221-223, 219-220.
- 11 Oates, Brown, 238.
- 12 Tilden Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, A Life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 224-225.

- 13 Oates, Brown, 233-234, 237.
- 14 Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 216.
- 15 Ibid., 208.
- 16 Stephen B. Oates, "John Brown and His Judges: A Critique of the Historical Literature," XVII, Civil War History, 5; Louis Ruchames, ed., A John Brown Reader (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Oates, Brown; Jules Abels, Man on Fire: John Brown and the Cause of Liberty (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Richard O. Boyer, The Legend of John Brown: A History and a Biography (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1973); Ronald Story, "John Brown and the Injuries of Class," a paper read at the Department of History, University of Massachusetts, Amherst (June 1973), 1-15.
- 17 Story, "Injuries," 2-3; Ruchames, Brown Reader, 73, 36-40, 39, 172, 166.
- 18 Ibid., 74; Story "Injuries," 3-4.
- 19 Story, "Injuries," 4-5.
- 20 Ibid., 6-9; For further examinations of the class status of abolitionists see, Leonard Richards, Gentlemen of Property and Standing, Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Gerald Sorin, The New York Abolitionists: A Case Study in Political Radicalism (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971); June H. and Willian H. Pease, Bound Them in Chains: A Biographical History of the Antislavery Movement (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); George Fredrickson's introduction to Hinton Rowan Helper's, The Impending Crises (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).
- 21 Stanley M. Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (2nd. edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 1-26; Elkins' entire introduction is a model for historiographical analysis.
- 22 George Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind; The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914 (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) chps. 5-6.

Chapter I

<sup>1</sup> Charles E. Stevens, Anthony Burns, A History (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856), 15-17; Samuel Shapiro, "The Rendition of Anthony Burns," Journal of Negro History, XXXIV (January 1959), 34-35, 40-41.

<sup>2</sup> Stevens, Burns, 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 19-21.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Henry Dana, Jr., Manuscript Journal, May 25, 1854, Massachusetts Historical Society; Shapiro "Rendition," 37; Stevens, Burns, 24-26; Theodore Parker, The Collected Works of Theodore Parker, ed. Francis Cobbe, "The New Crime Against Humanity" VI (15 Vols. London: Trubner and Company, 1863-74), 55-57; Hereafter to be cited as Works.

<sup>5</sup> Cobbe, Works, "The Condition of America," V, 318, 326; "The Three Chief Safeguards of Society," VIII, 55-58; Theodore Parker to W. H. Seward, May 19, 1854, Parker Letters, Harvard-Andover Theological Library, Harvard University; Theodore Parker, The Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker, ed. John Weiss, II (2 Vols. Boston: Bergman Publishers, 1869), 206-207; Hereafter to be cited as Parker Correspondence.

<sup>6</sup> Commager, Parker, 199, 201-202.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 140, 199, 214.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 220-222.

<sup>9</sup> Commager, Theodore Parker, chp. 10; Weiss, Parker Correspondence, II, 95; Theodore Parker, The Boston Kidnapping (reprint 1852 ed. New York: Arno Press, 1969), 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Weiss, Parker Correspondence, I, 102-103.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 99-101.



- 12 Stevens, Burns, 29-32; Ann Weston to ?, May 30, 1854, in "Trial of Anthony Burns," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society XXXIV (1910-11), 326; Hereafter this article will be cited as "Burns Trial."
- 13 Stevens, Burns, 32; Samuel May, Jr., to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 25, 1854, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 14 Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 7-17.
- 15 Ibid., 18-52.
- 16 Ibid., 56, 66; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, November 30, 1852, Higginson MSS, Harvard University Archives.
- 17 Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 66-68.
- 18 Ibid., 68-82.
- 19 Ibid., 84-109.
- 20 Ibid., 130-131; Howard N. Meyer, Colonel of a Black Regiment (New York: Norton and Company Inc., 1967), 69-72; Hereafter to be cited as Black Regiment.
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- 22 "Memo on Sims," Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 23 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Theodore Parker, June 24, 1852, Higginson MSS, Huntington Library; Theodore Parker to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, June 25, 1852, Huntington Library; "Memo on Sims," Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library; Samuel May, Jr., to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 25, 1854, "Burns Trial."
- 24 "Burns Narrative," Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 25 Ibid.

- 26 Ibid.; Samuel Gridley Howe, The Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe, ed. Laura Richards, II (2 vols. Boston: Dana and Estes Company, 1900), 268-269; Hereafter to be cited as Howe Journals; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 155-157; "Burns and Butman," newspaper clipping in Higginson MSS, Houghton Library.
- 27 Stevens, Burns, 33-34; Samuel Gridley Howe, "Address on the Prevention of Kidnapping," a speech given in Faneuil Hall on September 4, 1846, Widner Library, Harvard University, 4-5.
- 28 S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, February 18, 1851, October 21, 1852, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, December 5, 1851, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Richards, Howe Journals, II, 385; Howe's reaction to the Drayton episode is also informative on the ambivalence he felt about the use of violence. He fully believed in the justification of Higher Law but never seemed ready to personally actualize that belief; Samuel Gridley Howe, Slavery at Washington: A Narrative of the Heroic Adventures of Drayton, An American Trader (London: Ward and Company, 1848), 5.
- 29 Stevens, Burns, 38-39.
- 30 "Burns Narrative," Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library; Receipt for Handaxes, May 26, 1854, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Shapiro, "Burns Rendition," 38-39; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 155-157; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Cheerful Yesterdays (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 148-150; Hereafter to be cited as Yesterdays.
- 31 Stevens, Burns, 39, Appendix M, 289-295.
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- 34 "Burns Narrative," Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library; Stevens, Burns, 42-44.
- 35 Higginson, Yesterdays, 148-150; Stevens, Burns, 42-44; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 156-157.

- 36 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Mary Higginson, May 26, 1854, in "Burns Trial," 323; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Samuel May, Jr., May 28, 1854, in "Burns Trial," 325.
- 37 Samuel May, Jr., to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 30, 1854, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 38 Commager, Parker, 211.
- 39 In fact, Burns signed an affidavit to the effect that Stuttle had not been a hard master. But when he was informed that the statement would affect his hearing he seized the statement and tore it up; Stevens, Burns, 127, 62, 71-79; Samuel May, Jr., to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 29, 1854, in "Burns Trial," 325; Shapiro, "Burns Rendition," 40; Stanley W. Campell, The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860 (New York: Norton and Company, Inc., 1968), 124-132; Shapiro, "Burns Rendition," 40-43; Stevens, Burns, 96, 100-108; Samuel May, Jr., to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 31, 1854, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library; Stevens, Burns, 115-123.
- 40 Stevens, Burns, 127-134, Appendix G. H.; Campell, Slave Catchers, 130; Samuel May, Jr., to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, June 2, 1854, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library; Stevens, Burns, 137-150; Shapiro, "Burns Rendition," 45-49.
- 41 S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, December 28, 1851, February 16, 1854, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, June 18, 1854, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 42 S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, June 1854, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, June 18, 1854, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 43 S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, June 18, 1854, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 44 Cobbe, Works, VI, "Lesson for the Day," a sermon given on May 28, 1854, 44-49.
- 45 Cobbe, Works, VI, "New Crime Against Humanity," a sermon given on June 5, 1854, 75-77, 105-107.

46 Richards, Howe Journals, II, 268-269; Cobbe, Works, VI, "Lesson for the Day," 50; Austin Bearse, Reminiscences of Fugitive Slave Days in Boston (Boston: Warren Richardson, 1880), 12-13, 31-32; A comment made by Ann Phillips during the Burns Trial suggests strongly the nature of this "scape-goat" effort. One of the charges made against Loring was that he had not allowed proper access by counsel to the defendant. Yet Ann Phillips notes in a letter to Ann Weston that "Cimmissioner Loring was behaving very admirably as far as giving time and all that went. Wendell [Phillips] has free entry as the slave's agent. Ann Phillips to Ann Weston, May 25, 1854, "Burns Trial," 302; Irving Bartlett, Wendell Phillips, Brahmin Radical (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), 54, 115; Bartlett presents an excellent analysis of Phillips' theory about the use of public opinion.

47 Stevens, Burns, 223-231.

48 Shapiro, "Burns Rendition," 46-47; Charles Sumner to Richard Henry Dana, Jr., June 4, 1854, Dana MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; Stevens, Burns, 237-239; After losing the verdict Dana left the Court House and began walking to his home in Cambridge. On his way there he was attacked by two men who were angered by his defense of Burns. The lawyer was beaten and then knocked unconscious with the blow of a lead pipe. It took him weeks to recover full health. Ironically, during the course of Dana's recuperation he received a letter from Charles Sumner who asserted that "the blow [would] tell on slavery more than on you."

49 Stevens, Burns, 242-243.

50 Shapiro, "Burns Rendition," 39, 43; Richard Henry Dana, Jr., Manuscript Journal, May 27, 1854, Massachusetts Historical Society; Theodore Parker, Scrapbook, March 18, 1851, Boston Public Library.

51 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Massachusetts in Mourning," a sermon given June 2, 1854, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 162-164.

52 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, May 31, 1854, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library.

53 Ibid.; W. H. Channing to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, June 1, 1854; Wendell Phillips to Thomas Wentworth Higginson,

June 14, 1854; Albert Browne, Jr., to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, June 14, 1854, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library.

54 Martin Stowell to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, June 7, July 16, 1854, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library; Stowell's heroic behavior during the whole affair impressed Higginson greatly. Yet, it is interesting to speculate why Martin Stowell remained so tight-lipped and seemingly protective. Thomas Drew suggested some thirty years after the rescue attempt that Stowell by his own admission had fired the shot which killed James Batchelder; Thomas Drew to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, April 16, 1888, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library; Weiss, Parker Correspondence, 140, 146-150; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Theodore Parker, December 11, 27, 1854, January 17 and February 12, 1855, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library; The whole question of antagonism between Higginson and Parker after the attempt has hardly been raised. It is significant, however, because it aids our understanding of comments and assertions each man made during the three years of negotiations with and support of John Brown; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, May 31, 1854; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Samuel May, Jr., October 11, 1855; Samuel May, Jr., to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, October 11, 12, 15, 1885, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library.

55 W. H. Channing to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, July 4, 1855, Higginson-Burns Collection, Boston Public Library.

## Chapter II

<sup>1</sup> Commager, Parker, 232; Cobbe Works, V, "The Nebraska Question," 280-296.

<sup>2</sup> Godfrey T. Anderson "The Slavery Issue as a Factor in Massachusetts Politics from the Convention of 1850 to the Outbreak of Civil War," Dissertation, University of Chicago, June 1944, 75-159; William G. Bean, "Party Transformation in Massachusetts with Special Reference to the Antecedents of Republicanism, 1848-1860," Dissertation, Harvard University, 1922.

<sup>3</sup> Horace Andrews, Jr., "Kansas Crusade: Eli Thayer and the New England Emigrant Aid Company," New England Quarterly, XXV (June 1962), 498.

- <sup>4</sup> Ronald Story, "Class Development and Cultural Institutions in Boston, 1800-1870: Harvard, The Athenaeum, and the Lowell Institute," Dissertation, Wisconsin University, 1970, 128-134; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, Recollections of Seventy Years (2 vols. Boston: The Gorham Press, 1909), I, 13-14, 28, II, 302, 261.
- <sup>5</sup> Sanborn, Recollections, I, 30-31, 45.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 19; II, 315, 324-325; For the class implications of Sanborn's contacts with Boston and Concord society see Story, "Harvard," 154; Mary Crocker Newbold, "Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, 1831-1917: The Unknown Concord Transcendentalist," Honors Essay, Harvard University, 1970, 4-5.
- <sup>7</sup> Sanborn, Recollections, I, 45-46, II, 315.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., II, 268-272.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., II, 274-275, 282-287, 289-291, 207.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 289-291, 307.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., II, 275-280.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., II, 289-291; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, July 27, 1854, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.
- <sup>13</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, September 11, 1854, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.
- <sup>14</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, September 24, 1854, December 13, 1854, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.
- <sup>15</sup> Sanborn, Recollections, I, 51, II, 328; Newbold, "Sanborn," 9-12.
- <sup>16</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, to Theodore Parker, June 10, 1856, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.

18 Sanborn, Recollections, I, 68; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to ?, August 14, 1856, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.

19 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, November 28, 1856, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 P. T. Jackson to S. W. Gifford, December 3, 1856, Records, of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, Massachusetts Historical Society; Schwartz, Howe, 205-206; "To the Public," an advertisement for the Massachusetts Kansas Committee in Records of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, Massachusetts Historical Society; "Minutes of the Middlesex County Kansas Aid Committee," September 20, 1856, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

23 S. Beck to S. G. Howe, July 10, 1856, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Frank Preston Stearns, The Life and Public Service of George Luther Stearns (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott Company, 1907), 39, 118, 105, 126; Records of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, Massachusetts Historical Society; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 51-52.

24 Stearns, Life of Stearns, 13-17, 18-20, 24-27.

25 Ibid., 28-34, 36.

26 Ibid., 44.

27 Ibid., 51, 54-56, 130.

28 Ibid., 59, 81-83, 86.

29 Ibid., 69, 71-74, 78.

30 Ibid., 91.

31 Ibid., 41-42, 84, 88.

- 32 Ibid., 115.
- 33 Ibid., 49.
- 34 S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, December 26, 1851, April 1852, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 35 Richards, Howe Journals, "Report on State Beneficiaries," 13; Schwartz, Howe, 271-272; S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, December 29, 1851; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, February 6, 1852, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 George Luther Stearns to Rev. R. G. Watterson, November 10, 1842, Stearns MSS, New York Historical Society.
- 38 Richards, Howe Journals, 417-419; Schwartz, Howe, 197, 201, 205-206; S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, June 30, 1856, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; S. G. Howe to P. T. Jackson, November 22, 1856, Records of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, Massachusetts Historical Society.
- 39 S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, n.d. 1856, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Schwartz, Howe, 207, 208-211.
- 42 Ibid., 209-211; S. G. Howe to Agents and Leaders of the Emigrant Train, August 1, 1856, Howe MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.
- 43 S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, July 27, 31, 1856, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Wendell H. Stephenson, "The Political Career of James Lane," III, Kansas State Historical Society Publications (1930), 74.
- 44 S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, May 28, August 23, September 16, 1856, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Richards, Howe Journals, 419; Schwartz, Howe, 211-212.
- 45 Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 177, 138, 151-152, 178.



- 46 Ibid., 180-181, 186.
- 47 Ibid., 180-185; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, June 26, 1856, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library.
- 48 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, August 29, September 3, 1856, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 186-188.
- 49 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, September 18, 1856, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "A Ride Through Kansas," 14; This pamphlet first appeared as a series of articles during the first weeks of October 1856 in the New York Tribune under the signature "Worcester." It can be found in the Miscellaneous Pamphlets of Thomas Wentworth Higginson in the Higginson-Barney MSS, Houghton Library.
- 50 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, The Letters and Journals of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, ed. Mary Thacher Higginson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 143-145; Hereafter to be cited as Higginson Journals; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 186-188; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, September 18, 1856, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library.
- 51 J. B. Pond, The Eccentricities of Genius (New York: G. W. Dillingham Company, 1900); Charles F. Hosmer, The Life of James Repath and the Development of the Modern Lyceum (New York: Barse and Hopkins Publishers, 1926); These two works give a brief sketch of Repath's early life; Higginson, Higginson Journals, 141.
- 52 Thomas Higginson, "A Ride Through Kansas," 18, 22-23; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 190-191.
- 53 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, November 30, December 19, 1856, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 195.

### Chapter III

- <sup>1</sup> Sanborn, Recollections, I, 32-33; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to P. T. Jackson, January 13, 17, April 14, 1857, Records of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, Massachusetts

Historical Society; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Betram Esq., January 15, 1857, Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, "State Aid for Kansas," Middlesex Journal, December 1856, in Sanborn Scrapbooks, I, Boyd Stutler Collection.

<sup>3</sup> Sanborn, Recollections, I, 80-81; Oates, Brown, 181; John Brown to John Brown, Jr., January 1, 1857, Smith MSS, Syracuse University; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 76.

<sup>4</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 6, 1857, Higginson-Kansas MSS, Kansas Historical Society; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 193.

<sup>5</sup> Sanborn, Recollections, I, 76-79, 90-91, 120.

<sup>6</sup> Oates, Brown, 184; "Plan for the Defense of Kansas," Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Villard, Brown, 271.

<sup>7</sup> "Plan for the Defense of Kansas," Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Oates, Brown, 184, 187; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, January 5, 1857, Higginson-Brown MSS, Boston Public Library; Villard, Brown, 271; Henry Steele Commager, Theodore Parker: An Anthology (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 257-266.

<sup>8</sup> John Brown, Jr., to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, March 27, 1885, Boyd Stutler Collection; For a complete examination of Brown's religious convictions see Oates, Brown, passim.

<sup>9</sup> Commager, Parker, 81-82, chps. 4, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., chps. 10, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., chps. 1, 2; Story, "Harvard," 137-138.

<sup>12</sup> Oates, Brown, 187; S. G. Howe to Amos A. Lawrence, December 23, 1856, A. A. Lawrence MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>13</sup> Schwartz, Howe, 215, 247; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, n.d., September 21, 1856; S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, n.d. 1854, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.

- 14 S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, April 1852, May 19, 1852, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Oates, Brown, 187; S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, February 27, 1860, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 15 S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, January 18, 25, 1854, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 16 S. G. Howe to Amos A. Lawrence, January 8, 1857, A. A. Lawrence MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.
- 17 Oates, Brown, 189; Stearns, Life of Stearns, 129; "Mason Report" U. S. Senate Committee Reports (2 vols, 36th Cong., 1st Sess., 1859-1860), II, 227-228.
- 18 Stearns, Life of Stearns, 129-130, 134; Oates, Brown, 191.
- 19 Stearns, Life of Stearns, 155.
- 20 Oates, Brown, 192.
- 21 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "West Indian Emancipation Day Speech" given in July, 1856, Higginson-Barney MSS, Houghton Library; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 185-186; Higginson, Higginson Journals, 143; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, January 9, 1857, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library.
- 22 Harlow, Smith, 357; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 191; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to G. W. Curtis, January 25, 1857, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library.
- 23 James Repath to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, February 5, 1857, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 193-194; Martin Stowell to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 12, 17, 1856, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library.
- 24 Harlow, Smith, 357; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "A Ride Through Kansas," 10, 20-21; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 186, 191; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Untitled Speech, given August 8, 1856, in Miscellaneous Pamphlets, I, Higginson-Barney MSS, Houghton Library.

- 25 Liberator, January 2, 16, 1857.
- 26 Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 200; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, January 27, 1857, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Proceedings of the Worcester Disunion Convention, January 15-17, 1857 (Boston: Printed for the State Disunion Committee, 1857), 43-45, 51-52.
- 27 Proceedings of the Disunion Convention, 25-30.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Oates, Brown, 192-193; Sanborn Recollections, I, 137; "Resolutions of the National Kansas Committee," January 24, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society.
- 30 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, January 28, February 11, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University; James A. Rowley, Race and Politics: 'Bleeding Kansas' and the Coming of the Civil War (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott Company, 1969), 178-179.
- 31 O. B. Frothingham, Gerrit Smith (New York: G. P. Putnams Sons, 1877), 235; Harlow, Smith, 245-246; John Brown to Gerrit Smith, February 14, 1850, Smith MSS, Syracuse University; Harlow, Smith, 340-341.
- 32 Gerrit Smith, "The True Office of Civil Government" (New York: S. W. Benedict Company, 1851); Most of Smith's theoretical assumptions about the nature and purpose of government are contained in this pamphlet; Harlow, Smith, 357; Gerrit Smith to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 26, 1856, Higginson-Kansas MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; Gerrit Smith to Governor Ryland Fletcher, November 8, 1856, Smith MSS, Syracuse University; Gerrit Smith printed letter to the Syracuse Journal, May 31, 1856; Frothingham, Smith, 232-233.
- 33 Harlow, Smith, 350-353; Frothingham, Smith, 232-233; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Gerrit Smith, November 1, 1856; Gerrit Smith to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 8, 1856, Higginson-Kansas MSS, Kansas State Historical Society.
- 34 Harlow, Smith, 358, 368, 369; Gerrit Smith to Samuel May, December 22, 1856, Smith MSS, Syracuse University; On

Smith's reputation for financial care even in his philanthropic efforts see Frothingham, Smith, 225; Charles Sumner to Gerrit Smith, October 16, 1855, Smith MSS, Syracuse University.

35 Frothingham, Smith, 221; Harlow, Smith, 122-123, 304-305; Earl E. Sperry, The Jerry Rescue (New York: Anondiaga Historical Society, 1924), 24-25.

36 Ibid.; Frothingham, Smith, 215.

37 Frothingham, Smith, 218-223; Harlow, Smith, 322.

38 Harlow, Smith, 331-333, 323, 322, 327; Gerrit Smith, Speech on the Nebraska Bill, April 6, 1854, Smith MSS, Syracuse University.

39 Gerrit Smith to New York Tribune, July 17, 1855, Smith MSS, Syracuse University.

40 Gerrit Smith to William Goodell, November 1, 1854, Smith MSS, Syracuse University.

41 Harlow, Smith, 336-338; Gerrit Smith to Wendell Phillips, February 20, 1855, Smith MSS, Syracuse University.

42 Gerrit Smith to Charles Sumner, March 8, 1856, Smith MSS, Syracuse; Gerrit Smith, Untitled Speech, March 13, 1856, Smith MSS, Syracuse University.

43 Villard, Brown, 277-278; John Brown, Speech to the Massachusetts Legislature, February 18, 1857, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

44 Amos A. Lawrence to John Brown, February 19, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; John Brown to Amos A. Lawrence, February 21, 1857, A. A. Lawrence MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

45 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, March 1, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Amos A. Lawrence, February 19, 1857, A. A. Lawrence MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

46 Oates, Brown, 195; G. G. Hubbard to John Brown, March 2, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; John Brown to Mary Brown, March 31, 1857, Boyd B. Stutler Collection; John Brown to Mary Brown, March 6, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society.

47 Ibid.; E. Bingham to John Brown, March 9, 1857; John Brown, Broadside entitled, "To the Friends of Freedom," Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society.

48 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, March 1, 9, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University.

49 Sanborn, Recollections, II, 347, 353; Newbold, "Sanborn," 10-11, 27; Sanborn, Recollections, II, 104-108; Oates, Brown, 196-197.

50 Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for John Brown," in Thoreau: The Major Essays, ed. Jeffery L. Duncan, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1972) 149-150.

#### Chapter IV

1 Sanborn, Recollections, I, 114-115; Oates, Brown, 199; John Brown to Mary Brown, March 12, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; John Brown-Charles Blair Pike Agreement, March 30, 1857; Charles Blair to John Brown, April 15, 1857, Oliver Brown to Family, May 16, 1857, Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Villard, Brown, 283.

2 John Brown to Amos A. Lawrence, March 19, 1857, A. A. Lawrence MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

3 Ibid.; Amos A. Lawrence to John Brown, March 20, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; John Brown to Family, March 25, 1857, Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Villard, Brown, 279-280.

4 Oates, Brown, 201; John Brown to Mary Brown, March 31, 1857, Boyd B. Stutler Collection; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, March 21, 25, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University.

- 5 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, March 25, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University.
- 6 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, March 29, 1857, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, September 1, 1857, Higginson MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; Oates, Brown, 201.
- 7 Ibid.; Sanborn Recollections, I, 115-118.
- 8 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, March 29, 1857, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.
- 9 H. B. Hurd to John Brown, April, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; John Brown to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, April 1, 1857, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Villard, Brown, 287.
- 10 Villard, Brown, 287-288; John Brown, "Old Brown's Farewell," Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; Oates, Brown, 202-203.
- 11 John Brown, Jr., to John Brown, March 1, 1850, Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Stearns, Life of Stearns, 159-160.
- 12 Sanborn, Recollections, I, 118-119; Oates, Brown, 204; George Luther Stearns to John Brown, April 15, 1857, A. A. Lawrence MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.
- 13 John Brown to John Brown, Jr., April 15, 1857, Boyd Stutler Collection.
- 14 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, April 16, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University; Stearns, Life of Stearns, 159-160; John Brown to Lee Child, April 27, 1857, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.
- 15 Derrick Foster to John Brown, April 29, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society.
- 16 T. W. Carter to John Brown, April 25, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; John Brown to George Luther

Stearns, April 28, 1857, Smith MSS, Syracuse University;  
George Luther Stearns to T. W. Carter, May 1, 5, 1857,  
Stearns MSS, Kansas State Historical Society.

- 17 George Luther Stearns to John Brown, May 4, 6, 1857,  
Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Gerrit Smith to Amos A.  
Lawrence, May 3, 1857, A. A. Lawrence MSS, Massachusetts  
Historical Society.
- 18 Stearns, Life of Stearns, 139.
- 19 John Brown to George Luther Stearns, May 13, 1857, Boyd  
B. Stutler Collection.
- 20 John Brown to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, May 15, 1857,  
Boyd B. Stutler Collection.
- 21 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, May 20, 1857,  
Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University.
- 22 Ibid.; M. F. Conway to George Luther Stearns, May 11,  
1857, Sanborn Scrapbooks, I, Boyd B. Stutler Collection;  
George Luther Stearns to T. W. Carter, May 11, 1857, Sanborn-  
Brown MSS, Houghton Library; George Luther Stearns to John  
Brown, May 16, 1857, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.
- 23 John Brown to George Luther Stearns, May 23, 1857, Boyd  
B. Stutler Collection.
- 24 Amos A. Lawrence to George Luther Stearns, June 3,  
1857; M. F. Conway to George Luther Stearns, May 29, 1857,  
Boyd B. Stutler Collection.
- 25 Harlow, Smith, 394; Gerrit Smith to D. C. Littlejohn,  
May 18, 1857; Gerrit Smith, Speech on Personal Liberty Bill,  
June 18, 1857, Smith MSS, Syracuse University.
- 26 Harlow, Smith, 394-395.
- 27 Rawley, Race and Politics, 204-217.
- 28 John Brown, Jr., to John Brown, March 1, 1850, Sanborn-  
Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Oates, Brown, 208-209.



29 John Brown to Henry Stearns, July 15, 1857, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

30 Ibid.

31 Stearns, Life of Stearns, 140-141; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, August 8, 1857, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to George Luther Stearns, "Report of the North Elba Land Purchase," Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

32 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, August 14, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University.

33 Rawley, Race and Politics, 204; John Brown to George Luther Stearns, August 10, 1857, Boyd B. Stutler Collection; John Brown to Family, August 17, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; Stearns, Life of Stearns, 145; Oates, Brown, 216-218; Stearns did send Brown 500 dollars for "personal and family" needs.

34 Stearns, Life of Stearns, 144; E. B. Whitman to George Luther Stearns, October 25, 1857; George Luther Stearns to E. B. Whitman, November 14, 1857, Stearns MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; Oates, Brown, 216-218.

35 Schwartz, Howe, 214-215, 224, Richards, Howe Journals, 431; S. G. Howe to John Brown, June 13, 1857, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.

36 Richards, Howe Journals, 431; S. G. Howe to John Brown, November 7, 1857, Howe MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

37 Richards, Howe Journals, 452-453; S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, November 18, 1857; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, November 22, 1857; S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, December 16, 1857, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Samuel Gridley Howe constantly worried about excessive "family and personal" expenses. He claimed that before he was married he had "nearly twenty thousand dollars well invested and owed not a dollar." But since his marriage "joint expenses" had exceeded "joint income."

38 Gerrit Smith, Speech on Compensated Emancipation, August 26, 1857, Smith MSS, Syracuse University.

39 Liberator, September 18, 1857; Gerrit Smith, Speech at Jerry Rescue Commemoration, October 1, 1857, Smith MSS, Syracuse University.

40 John Brown to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, August 27, 1857, Boyd B. Stutler Collection; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, August 28, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University; In the letter to Sanborn, Brown also continued efforts to smooth relations with Stearns. The freedom fighter claimed that if he was able to he would avoid "such a speculation as shall swallow up all property I have been provided with." He would "hasten to keep it all safe, so that he [Stearns] may be remunerated."

41 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, September 11, 28, 1857, Higginson-Kansas MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 207.

42 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, August 28, September 14, 19, October 19, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University.

43 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, December 11, 1857, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University; Rawley, Race and Politics, 228-236.

44 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, November 1, 1857, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.

## Chapter V

1 Oates, Brown, 200-201; W. D. H. Callender to John Brown, July 2, 1857, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; G. M. Trevelyan, Garibaldi and the Making of Italy (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1914), 98-99; G. M. Trevelyan, Garibaldi's Defense of the Roman Republic (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1907), 349-351; Forbes statement in the New York Herald, October 27, 1859; Villard, Brown, 285-286.

2 Oates, Brown, 211-213.

3 Oates, Brown, 218; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, January 12, 1858, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University.

- <sup>4</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, January 12, 1858, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, January 17, 1858, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.
- <sup>5</sup> Oates, Brown, 225; John Brown to John Brown, Jr., February 9, 1858, Brown Notebook, II, MS, Boston Public Library; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, The Life and Letters of John Brown, (Boston: Ross Brothers, 1885), 432-433; John Brown, Jr., to Hugh Forbes, January 15, 1858, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.
- <sup>6</sup> Oates, Brown, 224-226; Rawley, Race and Politics, 213-214, 228-236.
- <sup>7</sup> Oates, Brown, 224; Villard, Brown, 319; John Brown to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, February 2, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn, Life and Letters of John Brown, 435-436.
- <sup>8</sup> Thomas Wentworth Higginson to John Brown, February 8, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Higginson, Higginson Journals, 191; John Brown to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, February 12, 1858, Brown MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; Sanborn, Life and Letters of John Brown, 436.
- <sup>9</sup> Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Collection of Clippings on Slave Insurrections, 1856, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, March 16, 1858, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library.
- <sup>10</sup> John Brown to Theodore Parker, February 2, 1858, in Weiss, Parker Correspondence, I, 163.
- <sup>11</sup> Stearns, Life of Stearns, 161-162.
- <sup>12</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, February 11, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- <sup>13</sup> John Brown to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, February 17, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn, Life and Letters of John Brown, 436; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.

- 14 Frothingham, Smith, 228-229.
- 15 Ibid., 229-230, 94; Harlow, Smith, 345-347; Gerrit Smith to Salmon Chase, January 30, 1856, Smith MSS, Syracuse University Library.
- 16 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, February 23, 1858, Boyd B. Stutler Collection; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 143-147.
- 17 Ibid.; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 155, 138, 143-146; Frothingham, Smith, 229-230; Ralph Harlow, "Gerrit Smith and the John Brown Raid" American Historical Review XXXVIII, 32-37; Sanborn first wrote the note on the back of a piece of paper Brown had used to sketch in the "rude outlines of Virginia forts." But the secretary scraped this when Brown cautioned him about necessity of developing the plan in absolute secrecy. Sanborn rewrote his note on a second piece of paper.
- 18 Sanborn, Recollections, I, 154-155, 77; Oates, Brown, 231; John Brown to Mary Brown, March 2, 1858, Brown MSS, Kansas State Historical Society.
- 19 John Brown to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, March 4, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn, Life and Letters of John Brown, 447; Oates, Brown, 234.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Oates, Brown, 234; Villard, Brown, 324-325; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, March 8, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 22 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, March 14, 1858, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, March 21, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Villard, Brown, 326; George Luther Stearns to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, April 1, 1858, Higginson-Brown, Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 23 Sanborn, Recollections, I, 151; Sanborn's assertion that after Brown revealed his plan in March 1858 he gave "no impression" that he meant to begin at Harpers Ferry is

probably true. So too is the secretary's contention that throughout 1858 the "place" of the attack was never made known to Boston members of the Secret Six. But his suggestion that Brown "never" revealed the location to anyone but Smith and Douglass is certainly not true. Before the attack began in 1859, Sanborn, Stearns, Higginson and, most likely, Howe knew of its location.

24 Theodore Parker "The Present Aspect of Slavery and the Immediate Duty of the North," a speech given on January 29, 1858, in Works, VI, 289; Theodore Parker to Francis Jackson, March 15, 1860, Parker Letterbooks, Massachusetts Historical Society; Refer to chapters 5 and 6 in Fredrickson's Black Image which deal with Romantic Racialism.

25 Commager, Parker, 253; Weiss, Parker Correspondence, I, 164-165.

26 Commager, Parker, 253.

27 Theodore Parker, The Works of Theodore Parker, ed. John Weiss, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1884-93) I, 152-153, 234-235; Hereafter to be cited as Parker Works.

28 Theodore Parker to Frank E. Parker, April 15, 1858, Parker Letters, Harvard-Andover Theological Library.

29 Weiss, Parker Works, VI, 252, Cobbe, Works, III, 246, Boston Daily Bee, March 17, 1858, Theodore Parker to Sarah Hart, March 23, 1858, Parker Letters, Harvard-Andover Theological Library.

30 Schwartz, Howe, 221-223, Richards, Howe Journals, 241.

31 Oates, Brown, 241-243; Villard, Brown, 315-316, 328-330; John Brown to John Brown, Jr., April 8, 1858, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

## Chapter VI

<sup>1</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, April 20, May 1, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.

- 2 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 5, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 156.
- 3 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 7, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 4 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to John Brown, May 7, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Higginson, Higginson Journals, 191; Theodore Parker to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 7, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 5 Schwartz, Howe, 228-229; S. G. Howe to Hugh Forbes, May 10, 1858, Howe MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; Forbes had first contacted Sumner in December of 1857 in order to obtain the names of Massachusetts Kansas committee-men who were supporting Brown. Apparently, Forbes didn't tell Sumner why he actually wanted the information. It was on the basis of that information, however, that the soldier eventually wrote his "abusive letters" to Howe and Sanborn in the January of 1858.
- 6 S. G. Howe to Henry Wilson, May 12, 1856, in "Mason Report," 216; S. G. Howe to Henry Wilson, May 15, 1856, Howe MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Letter #674, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Schwartz, Howe, 230.
- 7 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 11, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 8 George Luther Stearns to John Brown, May 14, 1858, "Mason Report," 227.
- 9 James Monroe Jones to Cleveland Leader, August 10, 1860, Boyd B. Stutler Collection; J. W. Loguen to John Brown, May 6, 1858, Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; John Brown to Family, May 12, 1858, Boyd B. Stutler Collection; Oates, Brown, 243-247; Villard, Brown, 330-338.
- 10 John Brown to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 14, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn, Life and Letters of Brown, 457; John Brown to Friends, May 21, 1858, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

- 11 Stearns, Life of Stearns, 185; George Luther Stearns to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 21, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 12 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Theodore Parker, May 18, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Higginson, Higginson Journals, 191.
- 13 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Speech to the New York Antislavery Society, May 12, 1858, in Liberator, May 28, 1858.
- 14 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 18, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Villard, Brown, 339.
- 15 Harlow, Smith, 400-401; Peter Brock, Radical Pacifists in Antebellum America (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 229-231.
- 16 Sanborn, Recollections, I, 155-160.
- 17 S. G. Howe to George Wood, May 26, 1858; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, April 6, 1858, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 18 S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, May 17, 18, 1858, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 19 John Brown to Friends in Cleveland, May 21, 1858, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.
- 20 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 31, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Oates, Brown, 250-251; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, June 4, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Villard, Brown, 396; Higginson, Cheerful Yesterdays, 222; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 167; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 212-213.
- 21 Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 212-213; "Higginson-Brown Memo," June 1, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; It is interesting to speculate why Brown remained silent about Sanborn. Certainly Brown realized that Sanborn had panicked like the others. Yet Brown said nothing

derogatory about him to Higginson. It is possible Brown sensed the personal tension that existed between the young committee secretary and the minister from Worcester. Brown seems to have realized how much he needed Sanborn's assistance and to have understood that if he censured Sanborn that assistance might be jeopardized. If, in a moment of anger, Higginson used Brown's remarks against the secretary there was no telling what effect they might have on Sanborn's future disposition to work in Brown's behalf.

22 Ibid.

23 John Brown to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, September 13, 1858, Brown MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 213; Villard, Brown, 340; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to John Brown, October 29, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Hugh Forbes also communicated with Higginson for the first time in early June; Hugh Forbes to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, June 6, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.

24 John Brown to the Six, June 28, July 20, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Villard, Brown, 353; Sanborn, Life and Letters of John Brown, 474-477.

25 Oates, Brown, 253; James Repath, The Roving Editor: or Talks with Slaves in Southern States (New York: A. B. Burdick, Publishers, 1859), Intro.

26 Repath, Roving Editor, III-IV, 507.

27 Ibid., 271-283.

28 Ibid., 284-287.

29 E. E. Whitman to George Luther Stearns, May 26, 1858, Stearns MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; Stearns, Life of Stearns, 178-179.

30 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, August 25, 1858, Sanborn Letters, Atlanta University.

31 Sanborn, Recollections, I, 176; Harlow, Smith, 361, 363, 380-382; Actually Smith's nomination on the "People's State Ticket" was also promoted by Democrats who were hoping to siphon off votes from Republicans.



32 Frothingham, Smith, 194-195; Gerrit Smith, Letter of Acceptance, August 4, 1858; Letter to Abolitionists and Prohibitionists, August 19, 1858; Letter to the Men who put me in Nomination, November 5, 1858; Gerrit Smith to J. Giddings, November 12, 1858, Smith MSS, Syracuse University Library.

33 Theodore Parker, Speech to New England Antislavery Society, May 26, 1858, in Worcester Daily Spy, May 28, 1858.

34 Theodore Parker, "The Effect of Slavery," a speech given on July 4, 1858, in Cobbe, Works, VIII, 146.

35 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to William Lloyd Garrison, September 28, 1858, Garrison MSS, Boston Public Library; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Physical Courage," II, Atlantic Monthly (September 1858), 728-730.

36 Ibid., 730-732.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 732-733.

39 Ibid., 728-773, 736-737.

## Chapter VII

<sup>1</sup> John A. Alexander, "The Ideas of Lysander Spooner," XXIII, New England Quarterly (1950), 204, 207; Lysander Spooner to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 28, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 214-215.

<sup>2</sup> Lysander Spooner, "A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery," Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Lysander Spooner, November 30, 1858, Spooner MSS, Boston Public Library.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.; Theodore Parker to Lysander Spooner, November 30, 1858, Spooner MSS, Boston Public Library; Wendell Phillips to Lysander Spooner, July 10, 1858, Spooner MSS, Boston Public Library.

- 5 Lysander Spooner to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, December 2, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Lysander Spooner to Governor Henry Wise, November 2, 1859, Spooner MSS, Boston Public Library.
- 6 Lysander Spooner to O. B. Frothingham, February 26, 1878, Spooner MSS, Boston Public Library.
- 7 Oates, Brown, 261-264; Villard, Brown, 370; [Floyd C. Shoemaker], "John Brown's Missouri Raid," XXVI, Missouri Historical Review, 80-83.
- 8 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet?" III, Atlantic Monthly, (February 1859), 137; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, January 19, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn, Life and Letters of Brown, 492; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 217-218.
- 9 Theodore Parker to Rebecca and Matilda Goddard, November 26, 1859, in Weiss, Parker Correspondence, I, 382-282.
- 10 Weiss, Parker Correspondence, I, 270-275, 279, 289, 298-299; Commager, Parker, 304-305; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, January 16, February 2, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 11 Ibid.; Julia Howe to Anne Mailliard, October 2, December, 1857, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Schwartz, Howe, 321, 324, 327-328.
- 12 Ibid.; S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, May 17, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 13 Ibid.; S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, January 22, 1860, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 14 Julia Howe, A Trip to Cuba (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860, 213, 236.
- 15 Howe, Trip, 11-12, 236.
- 16 Howe, Trip, 216-217; Julia Howe to Theodore Parker, May 18, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.

17 S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, March 25, 1860; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, March 12, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Richards, Howe Journals, 467; As George Fredrickson suggests in his work The Black Image in the White Mind, Howe continued his quest to determine whether or not the black man could adapt to life in a free society when he examined black life in Canada for the American Freedman's Bureau. See Fredrickson, chap. 5-6.

18 Ibid.

19 John Brown to S. G. Howe, March 1, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.

20 Oates, Brown, 268-269; Harlow, Smith, 403; Sanborn Recollections, I, 161-163.

21 Harlow, Smith, 6, 37, 194-199, 204-2-6; Frothingham, Smith, 54-59; Gerrit Smith, Sermons and Speeches (New York: Ross and Tausey, 1861), 17, 23, 25, 7; Harlow, Smith, 323; Frothingham, Smith, 73.

22 Ibid.; Smith, Sermons, 9-10; Harlow, Smith, 193-194, 388-389.

23 Smith, Sermons, 28-34, 19-20, 30, 36.

24 Ibid., 30.

25 Ibid., 47, 69, 117.

26 Frothingham, Smith, 237; Edwin Morton to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, April 13, 1859, in Sanborn, Recollections, I, 161.

27 Oates, Brown, 269.

28 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, March 4, April 6, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn, Life and Letters of John Brown, 493.

29 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, April 19, May 9, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 163.

- 30 Oates, Brown, 269.
- 31 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 9, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn Recollections, I, 163.
- 32 Sarah Forbes, The Letters of John Murray Forbes (2 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1899), I, 178; J. M. Forbes to S. G. Howe, May 12, 1859; S. G. Howe to J. M. Forbes, May 25, 1859, Howe MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; Schwartz, Howe, 232; Richards, Howe Journals, 436.
- 33 S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, January 22, 1860, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, August 20, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 36 S. G. Howe to Martin Conway, September 15, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.
- 37 Henry Bowditch, "Bowditch Letter," June 9, 1887, Brown MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; Stearns, Life of Stearns, 181; Oates, Brown, 270-272; Henry Wilson Testimony, "Mason Report," 140; Villard, Brown, 396-397; Sanborn, Life and Letters of John Brown, 523; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 30, June 4, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 38 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, May 30, 1858, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 39 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, June 17, July 22, 1859, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; In general, Higginson was pleased with the teaching methods Sanborn employed. He liked the informality of the classroom set up and the ease with which students moved around it. The "whole moral influence" of the school was "excellent." But one thing upset Higginson. He was afraid the relaxed routine of learning would bar students from "acquiring . . . or retaining habits of . . . application or regular discipline." Undoubtedly Higginson was prompted to reflect on the "school" which John Brown was preparing to start in the

Virginia mountains. Certainly no such laxity would exist there. The routine Brown envisioned in his Provisional Constitution would definitely inculcate habits of "application" and "discipline."

40 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, June 4, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Oates, Brown, 272.

41 Gerrit Smith to John Brown, June 4, 1859, in Sanborn, Recollections, I, 165; Smith, Sermons, 80, 45-46.

42 Frothingham, Smith, 228.

43 Gerrit Smith to John Thomas, August 27, 1859, Smith MSS, Syracuse University Library.

### Chapter VIII

<sup>1</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, August 24, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to John Brown, August 27, 1859, in "Mason Report," 67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; Stearns Testimony, "Mason Report," 233-235; Harry Stearns to George Luther Stearns, April 21, 1863, Stearns MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Brown, Jr., to John Kagi, August 11, 17, 1859, "Mason Report," 69; John Jr. also seems to have journeyed to Peterboro seeking aid from Gerrit Smith. Smith gave him 160 dollars and Edwin Morton told him that the philanthropist had his "whole soul absorbed . . . in this matter."

<sup>3</sup> George Luther Stearns to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, September 8, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Lewis Hayden to Mary Stearns, April 8, 1878, "Memo on Francis Merriam," Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

<sup>4</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, October 6, 13, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.

- 5 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, October 1859; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to James Russell Lowell, October 27, 1859, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library.
- 6 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Speech at Brimley Hall, October 25, 1859, in New York Herald, October 28, 1859; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, October 27, 1859, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 225, 231; Higginson, Higginson Journals, 86-87; Schwartz, Howe, 235.
- 7 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to John Brown, Jr., November 10, December 2, 1859, Higginson-Huntington MSS, Huntington Library; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 231.
- 8 Ibid., 224-225; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, November 5, 1859, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library; Henry G. Pearson, The Life of John A. Andrew (2 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1904), 160.
- 9 Julia Ward Howe, Reminiscences (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1899), 233; Schwartz, Howe, 235-237; S. G. Howe to Amos A. Lawrence, October 24, 1859, A. A. Lawrence MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.
- 10 Edwin Morton to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, February 1884, Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Boston Traveller, October 21, 25, 1859; New York Herald, October 25, 1859.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, October 21, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Villard, Brown, 530; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 187-189.
- 13 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, November 22, 1859, Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 192, 196.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, January 6, 1875, in "Some Verdicts and Trials," Higginson-Barney MSS, Houghton Library; Higginson Cheerful Yesterdays, 226.

16 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Louisa Higginson, November 5, 1859, Higginson MSS, Houghton Library, Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 227-228.

17 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Brown Family, November 4, 1859, Boyd B. Stutler Collection; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to J. Miller McKim, November 3, 5, 1859, McKim MSS, Kansas State Historical Society; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 228; George Sennot to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 5, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Thomas Wentworth Higginson to J. Miller McKim, November 5, 1859, McKim MSS, Cornell University.

18 Ibid.

19 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Brown Family, November 4, 1859, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

20 James Repath to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 13, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.

21 Frothingham, Smith, 241.

22 Frothingham, Smith, 242-243; Harlow, Smith, 222.

23 Harlow, Smith, 242.

24 Stearns Testimony, "Mason Report," 225-250; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 10, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; George Sennot to S. G. Howe, November 15, 1859, Howe MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

25 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 13, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 210.

26 S. G. Howe to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 9, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Villard, Brown, 513; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, November 21, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.

27 Samuel Gridley Howe "Disclaimer Card," November 15, 1859, in Worcester Telegram, Boston Transcript, November 15, 1859.

- 28 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to S. G. Howe, November 15, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 29 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, November 17, 1859; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 17, 1859; Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 226.
- 30 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 17, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 31 Julia Howe to Anne Mailiard, November 6, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Schwartz, Howe, 236.
- 32 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 19, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; John LeBarnes to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 7, 14, 15, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 33 Lysander Spooner to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 20, 1859; John LeBarnes to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 22, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 34 John Brown to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 22, 1859, Brown MSS, Boston Public Library; John LeBarnes to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 22, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 35 John LeBarnes to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 27, 28, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 36 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Lysander Spooner, November 28, 1859, Spooner MSS, Boston Public Library.

## Chapter IX

- <sup>1</sup> Theodore Parker to Francis Jackson, November 24, 1859, in Weiss, Parker Correspondence, 170-171; Samuel Gridley



Howe to Charles Sumner, December 3, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.

<sup>2</sup> S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, January 22, 1860, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; J. Andrew to S. G. Howe, December 3, 1859, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, December 3, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library.

<sup>4</sup> S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, January 22, 1860; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, January 18, 1860, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Schwartz, Howe, 246.

<sup>5</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, November 28, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Villard, Brown, 517; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 203-204.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm, 222; Sanborn interview by Katherine Mayo, January 19, 1909, Villard MSS, Columbia University.

<sup>7</sup> S. G. Howe to John A. Andrew, December 17, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to S. G. Howe, December 19, 1859, Howe MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>8</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, December 20, 1859, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, Samuel Gridley Howe, The Philanthropist (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1891), 273.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Sumner to S. G. Howe, December 15, 1859, Sumner MSS, Houghton Library; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, January 2, 1860, Sanborn-Brown, Houghton Library; Richard Abbot, "Cobbler in Congress: The Life of Henry Wilson, 1812-1875," Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1965; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, December 18, 1859, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; S. G. Howe to Henry Wilson, January 23, 1860, Howe MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, January 2, 1860, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.

- 10 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, January 2, 1860, Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, January 2, 1860; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, January 29, 1860, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 11 Ibid.; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 206-207, 222; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, January 26, 1860, Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library.
- 12 S. G. Howe to Horace Mann, 1856; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, April 25, 1852, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Richards, Howe Journals, 370-371; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, January 18, 1860; S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, January 22, 1860, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; In 1858 Howe was wary of running for public office because he feared having to eventually face people as a defeated candidate. While he claimed to fully understand that such an attitude implied "little faith in God's arrangements" he nonetheless refused to run. And when he did not run for office he also reproached himself for "want of faith and courage in my past," but admitted that his need for "approbation" outweighed this concern. Indeed the need for public approbation was the "rock" on which "most of my hopes have split."
- 13 Ibid.; S. G. Howe to Henry Wilson, January 23, 1860, Howe MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.
- 14 S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, January 24, 25, 26, 1860, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; Schwartz, Howe, 243-246.
- 15 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, February 3, 1860, Higginson-Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.
- 16 James Mason, article on conspiracy in the New York Herald, October 21, 1859; Worcester Spy, November 14, 1859; Henry Wise to ?, November 6, 1859, Brown MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society; "Mason Report," 1; Oates, Brown, 359.
- 17 Jacob Collamer to Amos A. Lawrence, December 29, 1859, A. A. Lawrence MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.
- 18 John Brown, Jr., to ?, 1860?, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

19 Henry Wilson Testimony, February 1, 1860, "Mason Report," 140-145; Andrew Testimony, February 9, 1860, "Mason Report," 186-192.

20 Richard Realf Testimony, January 21, 1860, "Mason Report," 98-107.

21 S. G. Howe to Theodore Parker, January 22, 1860; S. G. Howe to Charles Sumner, January 21, 1860, Howe MSS, Houghton Library; "Mason Report," 21.

22 S. G. Howe Testimony, February 3, 1860, "Mason Report," 157-178.

23 Ibid., 163-164.

24 Ibid., 164.

25 Ibid., 168.

26 Ibid., 177-178.

27 Ruth Brown Thompson to Mary Stearns, January 17, 1860, Boyd B. Stutler Collection; Stearns, Life of Stearns, 199; George Luther Stearns Testimony, February 24, 1860, "Mason Report," 225-251.

28 Ibid., 232, 234-235, 236; Howe also refused to see Merriam while he was staying in Canada.

29 Ibid., 237.

30 Ibid., 240-241.

31 George Luther Stearns to Charles Sumner, March 10, 1860, Sumner MSS, Houghton Library; Stearns, Life of Stearns, 207-210.

32 George Luther Stearns to S. G. Howe, February 27, 1860, in Stearns, Life of Stearns, 213.

33 S. G. Howe to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, February 16, 1860, Higginson-Brown MSS, Boston Public Library.

34 Ibid.; It is difficult to say who Howe's "honorable man" was. Three different men made key judgments about what Howe should do in the wake of Harpers Ferry. John Andrew, his legal counsel, encouraged Howe to go to Canada and wrote a number of letters to newspapers in early December defending Howe's character. It is possible these letters were partially motivated by a desire to recompense Howe for having given him poor advice about the disclaimer. Frank Sanborn also exerted a good deal of influence over Howe that fall and his defense of the card to Higginson suggests that he was not nearly as offended by it as the minister was. Sanborn also "knew about Brown's movements and a great deal more." Another candidate is George Luther Stearns. Stearns knew of Brown's movements and was with Howe in Canada when the card was submitted.

35 Ibid.

36 Majority Conclusions, "Mason Report," 13.

37 Ibid., 7-8, 10.

38 Ibid., 17-18.

39 Ibid., 23.

40 John Clarkson, Jr., "Wanted in Concord," Yankee Magazine (April 1969), 128-132; "Sarah Sanborn's Account of the Arrest," Sanborn-Brown MSS, Houghton Library; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 208-218.

41 Clarkson, "Wanted in Concord," 128-132; Betty L. Mitchell, "Realities not Shadows, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, the Early Years," XX, Civil War History (June 1974), 115-117; Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, Petition to the Massachusetts Legislature, Boston Transcript, April 4, 1860.

42 Sanborn, Recollections, I, 212.

43 "The New Martyr," New York Herald, April 7, 1860; Sanborn, Recollections, I, 217.

44 "The New Martyr," New York Herald, April 7, 1860.

- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Sanborn, Recollections, II, 452, 347, 447.
- 47 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to Theodore Parker, April 9, 1860, Sanborn MSS, Concord Free Public Library.

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