

GENERAL JESSE B. BROWN.

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AMONG the early settlers in Iowa, and especially in Lee county, none was better known, none more prominent, than General Jesse B. Brown. The general, in personal appearance, was remarkable — six feet seven inches tall in his stocking feet, as straight as an arrow, and in polished politeness — when sober — had no superior. Never forgot a name, nor its locality, nor the peculiar characteristics of the most casual acquaintance. When in his cups, there was no act of daring recklessness that he would not do. It was the wonder of himself and friends, that he escaped with his life, through his many reckless, dare-devil freaks.

General Brown was born in Christian county, Kentucky, about the beginning of this century. His father was a man of fair ability, excellent character, and independent means, a Baptist preacher of the hard-shell, iron-side order, did not preach for pay; did not believe in temperance societies, Bible societies, missionary societies, nor in Sunday schools; was ready to take his wine with any respectable citizen — unless at the communion table, where he admitted none but of the hard-shell order.

When a young man, Jesse B. removed to Illinois, and was for years clerk of the court of Edgar county. He commanded a company of rangers during the Black Hawk war, and was appointed captain of the first regiment dragoons in the regular army, August 15th, 1833. Montrose at the head of the De Moines rapids, was located as a military post, and this regiment ordered to that point. Probably no better material ever entered the army than this new company. This regiment of dragoons supposed that they would be engaged mainly in exploring what was then a western wilderness, but now the states of Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. When located at

Montrose, they had to build their own quarters and barracks, out of logs — all the lumber used had to be brought from Pittsburgh by boat.

About this time B. S. Roberts, who has figured since in several wars, and who has the reputation of being the brightest and sharpest man that West Point ever educated, was then fresh from West Point. Benny was the acting commissary of the post. The soldiers were mainly from the west, and knew all about building log houses; while Benny had never seen one built in his life, probably. The fort was beautifully located; the officers' quarters near the river, and the barracks for the soldiers on the high ground, with a double "L" running toward the river, leaving a beautiful piece of ground in the centre. The men had got one row of huts ready for the roof, when little Benny, in all the glory and pride of young West Point, discovered that *there were no doors cut into the rooms*. He at once ordered them torn down, and doors cut out. The soldiers tried to explain that they had notches in the logs; that they could put in a cross-cut saw, and saw out the doors when the roof was on; but West Point could hear no explanation. But, fortunately, when a part had been torn down, Captain Brown came along and stopped the work, and ordered them put up again as at first, much to the disgust of the young lieutenant. But Roberts fought gallantly in the Mexican war, and became a general during the late unpleasantness, and is now in Washington on the retired list. But I am sorry to say that he is not happy. He invented the best gun for killing people, that has ever been invented — as he says — but the war department will not adopt it; and worse than that, he had made a bargain with the Remingtons to manufacture his arms, and sell them to the French to be used in their late war with Germany; but just as the manufacturing commenced, the war department went to work and sold all of their old guns to the Remingtons, and thus defeated the sale of his — to the discredit of the war department, and the ruin of the French — as Benny

fully believes. Then, there is a law of congress against any officer prosecuting a claim before the war department. But, worst of all, Horace Greeley may be elected president, and after that all is to be peace, and no further use for guns. Horrible!

I could fill a book with laughable scrapes of Brown's while in the army; one I will give.

As before stated, his company was composed of good material — mainly young men of character, and while in the saddle, exploring the new world, were content; but when confined to barrack life, under the strictest discipline, they soon tired and many deserted. A batch of some half-dozen went off, crossing the Mississippi river on the ice. Brown followed them, spending a day and a couple of nights at Capt. Knapp's, in Ft. Madison. He was on one of his high benders; it was getting late in the winter and the ice on the river was so soft that no one had dared to venture on it for several days. But Brown swore that he would cross. He was on a powerful horse, and no Camanche Indian ever rode a horse better than he did. He had drunk enough to make him perfectly reckless. He went on to the ice in full run, and so crossed the river. All of the people of the town, not many at that time, however, stood on the bank, breathless, expecting every jump of the horse to be his last. When Brown had crossed the channel, and was out of danger, he turned and waved his plume to the relieved spectators, and gave a few Indian yells and rode off. He followed the deserters to Rushville, Illinois, where he lost them.

Rushville was settled mainly by Kentuckians, many of them acquaintances of Brown's, and generally of the hard-shell Baptist persuasion. The town had a good tavern for that day, a good drinking place close by, where groceries of all kinds were sold, and whisky was sold by the tin-cup, after the good old Kentucky style, and, as the season was dull, the people had little else to do than go to town and drink. Brown enjoyed himself hugely for several days, in getting the grocery full of people and supplying them with

whisky. At ninepence a tin-cup, a little money goes good way, and the General soon became the most popular man in all that region, his fame spreading day by day, and his customers continually increasing. In looking around the grocery, he had discovered behind the counter, an empty powder-keg. When the General felt that the thing had run long enough, he got out his horse in the morning, to leave, but went over to the grocery and found it chuck full, all rejoiced to see him; but instead of treating the crowd as before, the general walked behind the counter, took up the powder-keg, opened the stove door, and, with a terrible oath, swore that he thought that population had lived long enough, and threw the powder-keg into the stove. No crowd ever made haste more quickly to get out the store than did that one. When they had all got out — without any reference to their manner of going — the General walked out, mounted his horse, gave a few Indian yells, and galloped off.

In the spring of 1837, the General resigned his commission, and moved to Fort Madison. He had opened a large store at that point previously; but the general break-up of that year that was so fatal to the business men south and west, broke him. It was a sad blow to his sensitive nature, and more sad to his proud family, leaving them poor and helpless.

In 1838, the General was elected a member of the council of the first Iowa territorial legislature, running ahead of his ticket — in fact, he was the only candidate that was elected on the ticket that he ran upon. At the meeting of the legislature he was elected president of the council, and since then there has never been a more successful presiding officer of the territorial council or state senate than Brown made that winter, notwithstanding, the session commenced in a fight with Conway, the secretary of the territory, a dissipated, wild, talented, educated Irishman, and ended in a fight with the governor. The fight with the secretary was about pen-knives, and with the governor about the ap-

pointment of a few notaries, and a general or two. The sort of generals — like Cary, of Michigan, made famous by Tom Corwin — the whole thing was worse than a farce, and was kept up by a few men on each side for spite. Brown had no heart in the fight, and, as presiding officer, gave entire satisfaction to both sides. Politically, Brown was a follower of Henry Clay, then a republican, but never a bitter partizan.

√Fort Madison was one of the handsomest and most prominent towns in the territory for many years, and has always been one of the solid, steady-going towns. She was one of the towns laid off and sold by act of congress. From 1835 to 1837, speculation in town lots ran high, and a great deal of money was made and lost in the operation. One of the operators was √Benjamin Brattain, now in Oregon. Ben had some town lots after the break-up in 1837; was lazier than the laziest man that you could name; had little education, but was good-natured and kind, and always reading — but if he ever had an idea that Ed Johnston did not furnish him with, no one ever heard of it.

One day when the General was running a good head of steam, he found Ben in the Madison house, in his usual seat, reading. The General took a large pin, and walked up to Ben, stretched out his ear, and run the pin through it, leaving it in the ear. Ben sprang to his feet, took up his chair, and made for the General. Brown straightened himself up to his full height, and, with an astonished and injured look, demanded with terrible oaths, what Ben meant. Brattain called his attention to the condition of his ear. Brown, with still greater surprise, swore the country was coming to a nice condition when a man could not take little liberties with his friends, without their getting mad about it. Ben quietly took out the pin from his ear, acknowledged satisfaction, and went to reading again.

On one occasion during one of the numerous county-seat contests in Lee county, √Guy Wells and Brown were sent as a committee to √Montrose to secure the √Mormon vote for

Fort Madison. Brown was always a favorite with the Mormons. Their conveyance was the box-trap stage of that day. Brown and Wells occupied the back seat; on the seat next in front was a rough specimen, who made himself offensive by boasting of his many Indian, and other brave exploits. Brown was in a mellow mood, and, after standing the fellow's boasting as long as he could, he turned to Wells and enquired if he ever heard of how he had served a Comanche chief during the expedition of the dragoons into this country, years before. Wells said that he never had, when Brown went into a minute account of the quarrel, at the end of which he hit the chief with his fist, "knocking him heels over head," and suiting the action to the word, he hit the fellow such a blow in the short-ribs that it knocked him breathless, to the front of the stage under the driver's feet. The driver stopped and drew the fellow up, when Brown, with the kindest words, inquired if he was hurt, assuring him that he was merely illustrating his story. As soon as the fellow could speak, he informed the General that in future, when illustrating *that story*, he hoped that he would find some other subject than himself to illustrate upon. They were no more troubled with Indian stories from that fellow, that trip.

General Brown had no capacity for ordinary money-making trades or business. No man had a keener relish for the pleasures and enjoyments that money gives a man; yet he had no more capacity to husband it than a child. If he had possessed the wealth of an Astor, all his friends and those about him would have been rich as long as his money lasted; the result was, that from his failure in business in 1838, to his death in 1864, his life was a life of poverty, and much of the time, real want of the ordinary necessities of life; but, during all that time, I never heard him complain of Providence or the world. He always attributed his want of success to his own faults. In his drinking, he was not like other men; when he drank, it was a wild spree—while it lasted, probably but a few days, but sometimes

running into weeks; then he would not drink a drop for months, and I am sure no person ever tried harder to restrain himself from doing evil than did Brown to keep out of these sprees. Those that were intimate with him could tell when they were coming on, by his restlessness. He could not be still until night, and then he would surrender to his old enemy, and none knew the infamous character of the enemy better than Brown, himself.

Nearly one-third of Lee county is included in what is known as the "Half-Breed tract." This tract had been given in treaty by the Sac and Fox tribes of Indians, to the half-breeds of their tribe. Speculators soon bought out the interest of these half-breeds; bought mostly by a New York company and parties in Saint Louis. In the spring of 1841, the Lee county district court, Charles Mason, judge, made a decree dividing these lands into one hundred and one shares. With one or two exceptions, the claimants all lived outside of Lee county. The settlers on the tract repudiated this claim, and unitedly organized for mutual defense and protection against the claimants under the decree, and, constituting about one-third of the voters of the county, they were a political force. It was claimed by them that the survey of the tract was wrong; that, in place of there being one hundred and nineteen thousand acres, there were, honestly, but twenty or thirty thousand at most, and that of right, the balance was government land, and they petitioned congress for the passage of a law authorizing a resurvey. General A. C. Dodge was then the delegate in congress, from the territory, and he succeeded in getting a law passed by congress, for a resurvey. This was glad tidings for the settlers; but no survey was made, and the next session of congress repealed the law.

General Dodge, who was, probably, the most popular and efficient delegate that has ever been in congress, from any of the territories, opposed the repeal; but the New York and Saint Louis interests were too powerful for him, and beside it was shown that the old survey was correct, and gave the claimants under the decree vested rights that con-

gress could not disturb. This was a hard blow on the settlers, and it came just at the time of the state organization.

The settlers were made to believe that the repeal of the law was all the fault of the delegate; that he was out at a horse race when the repealing bill passed, etc., etc.; the result was, that there was an anti-Dodge party organized in Lee county, that elected the entire legislative and county ticket — electing James Sproat and Jacob ~~Honner~~ ^{Humer} to the senate; Jesse B. Brown, William Street, and W. J. Cochran, whigs, and Josiah Clifton and Reuben Couler, democrats, to the house.

It so happened that the three democrats from Lee county held the balance of power in the legislature. At the meeting of the legislature, Brown was elected speaker. In caucus, the democrats nominated A. C. Dodge and Judge Wilson, of Dubuque, for senator. The whigs, with the three anti-Dodge democrats, met in caucus and nominated Jonathan McCarty, a distinguished Indian war carpet-bagger, who claimed Keokuk as his home, and Jacob Humre, for the senate. *Not a single member in the caucus, but the three anti-Dodge democrats, wanted either McCarty or Humre for senator; but the party feeling was so strong that the whigs stood by their nominations, with the single exception of Dr. Fulenwider, of Des Moines, who voted for Browing, his senatorial colleague, in place of McCarty — McCarty lacking but the single vote, of an election.*

The joint convention adjourned without an election, and did not meet again during the session. There was not then, as now, any act of congress requiring an election of senators on a particular day. Their failure to elect senators created the most intense excitement that I ever saw.

General Dodge was at this time the political idol of his party; his election as senator was desired above all things else, politically. Brown was speaker of the lower house, and had a set of friends that was disposed to make any sacrifice to serve him; the result was, that a few of the friends of Dodge and Brown organized a scheme to make Dodge and Brown the senators. It was found that it could

be done if Brown would give his consent to the arrangement; but when he was approached on the subject, he positively refused to be a party to the arrangement — insisting that in caucus he had pledged his honor to stand by the nominees of the caucus, and that he meant to do it in good faith. A very distinguished democratic friend of General Dodge, and an old personal friend of Gen. Brown, went all the way to Galena, in the middle of winter, by land, to get Judge Thomas Brown, one of the judges of the court of appeals of the state of Illinois, and brother of General Brown, to influence the General to join in the arrangement to make himself and Dodge the senators. Judge Brown wrote the General, urging him at once to accept, and telling him that it was a crime to his family for him not to accept; and he then went on to depict the condition of his family: His wife was dead: his eldest daughter nearly grown; another daughter that soon would be grown, and the youngest, a poor child ten years old, and afflicted with epileptic fits so that her mind was almost destroyed — all needing care and attention such as he was not able to give them in his condition of poverty. To be elected United States senator at once gave him and his family position in society, and also money to care and provide for them. The letter was written to touch the General's pride of family, and also to sting him in his poverty. This letter Brown read to me — the tears running down his cheeks, and swearing at his brother for too cruelly bringing home to him the poverty-stricken condition of his afflicted family. The letter had no influence upon Brown; he said his honor was at stake, and to betray his honorable pledge, for his own benefit, was to disgrace himself, and, after that, life would be useless to him. How many politicians would refuse a senatorship now, when they could get it by breaking a caucus pledge? General Dodge was then delegate in congress, and at Washington, and did not know of this attempt to elect him and Brown; if he had, I am fully satisfied that he would have repudiated the arrangement, just as Brown did.

The year following, Brown was the whig candidate for

congress in the first district, and, strange to say, McCarty, for whom he had given up a seat in the United States senate, stumped the district against him, in favor of William Thompson, of Mount Pleasant, one of McCarty's most bitter opponents, of the winter before. Brown ran ahead of his party, but was beaten by a few hundred votes. If McCarty had supported him, he would have been elected.

A few years later, when the Honorable Daniel F. Miller was in congress, he had the General appointed visitor to West Point. The General's friends furnished him a suit of clothes, and he did not drink a drop of liquor during the trip; and no man made a finer appearance at West Point, than he did, nor commanded more respect.

The General was for many years a justice of the peace in Keokuk. He paid little attention to the law, but always decided what he believed to be right. On one occasion a young medical student was arrested for not marrying a young lady, as he had promised to do and ought to have done a good while sooner. The college had closed, and the young man was about to leave without the wedding. Brown was in a good mood to enforce justice, when the young man was brought before him. The justice asked him if he had not promised to marry the girl present. The answer was in the affirmative. "Why the hell have you not done it?" said Brown, and at once ordered a friend of the young lady to go for the license. When the license was brought, the judge ordered them to stand up and lock hands, when he married them — the student quietly acting the part of bridegroom.

In 1858 or 1859, the General went to live with his second daughter, who had married and lived in Covington, Kentucky. In 1860, he voted, with one or two hundred others, for Mr. Lincoln for president, and during the winter of 1860-61, was an intense Union man. In the latter part of the winter — or early in the spring, when secession ran the highest — the general met in a large party of gentlemen, and most of them secessionists, Greene Clay Smith, with a ribbon in his button-hole that Brown took to be an em-

blem of secession. That was too much for him; that a relative of Henry Clay — his political idol — should be in favor of destroying the Union. He at once commenced cursing Smith for disgracing his Clay blood. Smith, in telling me about it, said that he had heard refined, eloquent, and bitter swearing before, but nothing that he had ever heard before equaled Brown. The eloquence of the language and manner captivated him. As soon as Brown had exhausted himself and stopped, Smith told him that he was as good a Union man as Brown was. Brown at once grabbed his hand; tore the ribbon out of the button-hole, and pinned on a rosette, and told Smith to wear it — which he did, bringing down the curses of his secession neighbors to such an extent that he had to enter the Union army for self-protection. Brown at once became the leader of Smith's friends, and knocked down a good many of the chivalry. Smith said that Brown would never hit but once, and then he was almost sure to bring down his man, when his friends would take the fight off his hands.

Brown did not live to see the glorious end of the infamous rebellion.

Poor, noble-hearted friend! What I have written has been written without fee or hope of reward, and, most probably, it will never be read by a single relative of Brown's. If the General had used his talents to enrich himself at other people's expense — as many others have done — and thereby grown rich, few people would have inquired how the wealth came — how many people, and better people than himself, had been ruined in obtaining it — how many widows and orphans had been robbed — and besides, he would have had no trouble, for *small pay*, in having a rose-tinted life written, even by a Parton. But Brown was poor, his sympathies were with the poor, and he died in poverty. Verily he must have his reward in the world to which he has gone — or it will be hard indeed, on some others when they leave this world, where fraud too often gives wealth.

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