

LEONARD BROWN

POET AND POPULIST

Throughout the last half of the nineteenth century Leonard Brown was well known in Des Moines and its environs. Fearless, positive in his convictions, eccentric, idealistic, and impractical, and, above all, full of dreams and visions for the betterment of his fellowmen, Leonard Brown was a man born out of time and, perhaps, in some respects ahead of it. As a youth, he dreamed of becoming the poet of the Iowa prairies; in early maturity he endeavored to reform educational methods; and for years he fought the inroads of John Barleycorn. His supreme dream, however, culminated in his efforts to establish a better social order in America, one in which both agricultural and industrial workers might share, with some degree of equality, the wealth of the country.

The story of Leonard Brown's sixty years of living in Iowa began on the first of October, 1853. On that day, he sat on the front seat of a canvas-topped prairie schooner as it creaked its slow way along the main thoroughfare from the east into the village of Fort Des Moines. From the driver's seat Leonard guided the tired horses to a two-family log cabin which then stood some eighty rods southwest of what is now called Capitol Hill. There Aaron Brown, his two sons, Leonard and Harvey, and, possibly, two daughters, Minerva and Mary M., spent their first winter in Iowa.¹ The mother, Margaret M. (Cory) Brown had died in 1848.

The Brown family had come overland from Syracuse,

¹ L. F. Andrews's *Pioneers of Polk County, Iowa and Reminiscences of Early Days*, Vol. II, pp. 29-33.

Indiana, where the elder son, Leonard, was born on July 4, 1837. At the age of thirteen he had been apprenticed to a blacksmith who taught him to blow the bellows, work at the forge, and cast horseshoes, yet somewhere he acquired a hunger for books and some knowledge of mathematics and Latin.²

Leonard Brown had also acquired a sense of patriotism and family pride, for he knew that his grandfather, Daniel Brown, and six brothers, had enrolled at Boston and fought with the Continental army. On his father's side, too, he was related to Charles Farrar Browne, better known as the famous humorist, Artemus Ward.³ On his mother's side Leonard Brown was a cousin of William A. ("Billy") Sunday, their mothers being sisters.

From his work in the blacksmith shop, the boy had acquired a strong back, hands used to hard work, and self reliance. On the long trek from Syracuse, Indiana, young Leonard had shared with his father, Aaron Brown, the difficulties of pioneer travel. These reached their climax when a flash flood swept away the flooring of a bridge over a creek. When the Browns realized the impossibility of securing repairs, father and son took the wagon apart. By wading in water dangerously high, they transferred the furniture, food supplies, even the wheels, to the other side. By swimming their horses across, they were able to float the wagon bed safely to the other side where they painstakingly reassembled the wagon and its contents and drove on westward toward Iowa.⁴

The mover's wagon had scarcely been unloaded when sixteen-year-old Leonard began to explore the frontier

² *The Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. XI, p. 632.

³ Johnson Brigham's *Des Moines . . . Together with a History of Polk County*, Vol. II, p. 955; "Life and Death of Leonard Brown" in *The Register and Leader* (Des Moines), September 2, 1914.

⁴ L. F. Andrews's *Pioneers of Polk County, Iowa*, Vol. II, p. 28.

town, still called Fort Des Moines. He found that its inhabitants, numbering some five hundred, lived in log and frame houses in straggling rows on both sides of the Des Moines River. On Second Street he found "a small row of frame one-story buildings" and scattered over the bottomlands he caught glimpses of a few outlying "soldier cabins and a few little frame and log dwellings"; beyond, stretches of brown cornfields reached the hills on the north and west.⁵

The roof of the frame courthouse, located on the site of the present Union Railway Station, rose conspicuously above the tops of the other buildings. Near it Leonard Brown found a public square on which he was soon to watch wandering bands of Sauk and Fox Indians perform their tribal dances. In the courthouse itself, however, he found the fulfillment of his long-cherished dream — his opportunity for an education. The Polk County authorities had donated the use of the courtroom to Reverend John Anson Nash — "Father Nash" to the pioneer Baptists of Des Moines — for his school, known as the Des Moines Academy.⁶

Leonard Brown lost no time in presenting himself at the doors of this little academy where new avenues for his future opened up. Not only did it insure higher education for the stripling but it gave him two life-long friends — Doctor John Anson Nash and his wife who also taught in the school. When Leonard Brown appeared on the threshold of Des Moines Academy that day in October, 1853, John Anson Nash read the genuine eagerness for learning in the boy's face and Leonard knew that he had found a friend who would not laugh at his ambitions. The older

⁵ *The History of Polk County, Iowa* (Union Historical Company. 1880), p. 618.

⁶ Dan Elbert Clark's "Some Episodes in the Early History of Des Moines" in *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. XIII, p. 226.

man supplied the boy with books, gave freely of his time, and personally instructed his pupil in Latin and higher mathematics. More than a half century later when, in 1908, Leonard Brown published his last book, *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be*, he expressed his indebtedness to his teacher in these words: "To the memory of JOHN ANSON NASH, D.D., The Fatherly and Christ-like Teacher, to whom the author is indebted for the sublime ideal of his life-work — 'to live to make the world, the better, the wiser the happier.'"⁷

The tuition at Des Moines Academy cost only four dollars a term, but Aaron Brown found himself financially unable to assist his ambitious son with his education. Young Leonard immediately applied for work at a smithy operated by William De Ford where, by acting as "blower and striker" at the forge and by casting horseshoes, he was able to earn his board and room. Doctor Nash also remitted the boy's tuition with the understanding that he tend the fires and keep the courtroom cleaned and scrubbed.⁸

By the second autumn both Leonard and his tutor decided that the youth knew enough to teach in a rural school and a position was found for him in Story County. The log schoolhouse, traditionally reported to be the oldest in the county, and the first rural school west of the Skunk River, represented the status of education in central Iowa in 1854. The crudely built cabin, Brown later recalled, possessed "a stick chimney" well beplastered with mud, "sod jambs, and a rude fireplace." Since the school was supported by subscriptions, the young schoolmaster was forced "to board round" with his patrons in their overcrowded log cabins, which, he recalled, lay "at magnificent dis-

⁷ "A Clarkson Tribute" in *The Register and Leader* (Des Moines), September 8, 1908.

⁸ L. F. Andrews's *Pioneers of Polk County, Iowa*, Vol. II, p. 30.

tances" from one another. For teaching three full terms his total cash remuneration amounted to forty-five dollars.⁹

The autumn of 1855 found Leonard Brown back in school, assisting John A. Nash. A few months later Brown was recommended to a tutorship in the Burlington Collegiate Institute, probably at the instigation of Father Nash, for the latter had been present at the meeting of the Iowa Baptist Association when the articles of incorporation for the Institute, first called Des Moines University, were drawn up in 1851 and had continued to serve on the board of trustees.¹⁰ At Burlington Brown's pay consisted largely of board and lodging, but he was able to continue his study of the classics and of mathematics and he found recreation in long tramps over the hills above the Mississippi where he searched out old Indian trails. These walks were to bear fruit in the poems he subsequently published.

Off and on Leonard Brown taught in rural schools. In a school near Flint Creek, a few miles north of Burlington, he had an experience which confirmed his belief that no boy really wanted to be bad. Before he began his teaching, he was informed that Charley Adams, the bully of the school, had boasted that he would run the new teacher out of that district. During Adams' first day in school, he tried Leonard Brown's patience to the utmost. The young schoolmaster requested the boy to remain after school, engaged him in conversation, caught the boy's attention, and among other things assured Charley that he saw in him marks of superior ability and leadership. Brown explained to him the great difficulties he himself had faced in securing an education and promised to share with the boy his chief treasure — a trunk full of books. Charley Adams not only

⁹ L. F. Andrews's *Pioneers of Polk County, Iowa*, Vol. II, p. 30.

¹⁰ L. F. Andrews's *Pioneers of Polk County, Iowa*, Vol. II, p. 30; Alonzo Abernethy's *A History of Iowa Baptist Schools* (1907), pp. 74, 75.

returned to school the next morning; he ceased to be the bad boy of the district and later attended the Burlington Collegiate Institute.¹¹

Work in various select schools and academies occupied Leonard Brown for brief periods. In 1856 he taught in St. Mark's College at Palestine in Story County and he himself opened a select school near Avon south of Des Moines in 1860.¹² In the meantime, John Anson Nash was both urged and financially assisted by several prominent citizens in Des Moines in opening an academy on Ninth Street, then in the midst of thick woods. This school was named Forest Home Seminary. In 1861 Nash enlisted the help of his former pupil, Leonard Brown, and except for a brief period when the latter served in the Civil War with the Forty-seventh Iowa Infantry, Brown taught with Nash and his wife in Forest Home Seminary for three years. In 1864 Nash became interested in forming Des Moines University, with the assistance of the Iowa Baptist Association, and turned the Seminary over to Leonard Brown who conducted it until he was elected county superintendent of Polk County for the years 1865-1867. He took his new position very seriously, visited every school in Polk County three times during the two years, and "tried to import to teachers instruction in methods of teaching, examined classes orally and lectured to children." For this he received three dollars per day for time spent in visiting schools and \$150 per year. To his great disappointment, he did not win re-election to the county superintendency in 1867.¹³

¹¹ L. F. Andrews's *Pioneers of Polk County, Iowa*, Vol. II, pp. 30, 31; Leonard Brown's *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be*, pp. 88, 89.

¹² Dan Elbert Clark's "Some Episodes in the Early History of Des Moines" in *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. XIII, pp. 233-237; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Polk County* (Chicago. Lake City Publishing Co. 1890), p. 648. C. Ray Aurner gives the formal opening of Forest Home Seminary as 1859.— See his *History of Education in Iowa*, Vol. III, p. 92.

¹³ *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1865-1867*,

In the meantime, against great odds, Leonard Brown had succeeded in winning the hand of Nancy Jane Houston, a young schoolmistress of East Des Moines. Her family strenuously objected to his radical views on government and religion and his proneness to assert his views on all occasions. A trunkful of letters, a number of which he printed in 1879, won the siege and the two were married on November 7, 1861.¹⁴ To feed and clothe his family, Leonard Brown often found himself forced to take his place at the blacksmith's forge, to teach in rural schools, and to resort to farming. He sought also to eke out his scanty income by publishing verse, essays, and sermons, by preaching for the Universalists, and later by lecturing for prohibition and for the Greenback and Populist parties.

In early years Brown found his chief recreation in wandering along the edges of prairie sloughs in search of scarlet lilies and along the timber-lined banks of the Des Moines and the Mississippi rivers, alert for Indian trails and for arrow heads and other relics. He had been fascinated by the Indians of Iowa. He had heard reports of their keening as the last groups of Fox and Sauk moved from central Iowa to distant reservations in Kansas. Such stories sent him in pursuit of the already vanishing legends of Black Hawk, Keokuk, Poweshiek, and Mahaska. He "walked for miles along the beaten pathway that led from village to village deserted, and by abandoned cornfields . . . traced the beaten circle where the red men had performed their war dances, and . . . looked sadly upon the bones of the Indian dead, strewn over the surface of their burial grounds."¹⁵

pp. 98, 99; Leonard Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", p. 49.

¹⁴ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", p. 45.

¹⁵ See the Preface to Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), pp. v, vi.

Leonard Brown was Iowa's pioneer poet of the prairies. In 1865 he published in Des Moines his first volume of verse with the well-chosen title of *Poems of the Prairies*. At the time of this publication he was twenty-eight years old, but the poems themselves had been accumulating in his notebooks for ten years. During the summer of 1858 while assisting his father with farm work, he began to shape up his little volume of verses. For several years he had continued to add to his manuscript collection of poems, but war conditions and his scanty pittance from teaching made it impossible for him to publish them. In 1865, however, through the patronage of B. F. Allen, a philanthropic banker in Des Moines, he was enabled to realize his dream of seeing his *Poems of the Prairies* in print.¹⁶ This little volume ran through three editions, in 1865, 1868, and 1879, each one containing some poems not found in the others.

In 1884 he essayed another volume of poetry, which he called *Iowa The Promised of the Prophets*. It consisted largely of new poems which bitterly satirized economic and political conditions, but it also included several items from his *Poems of the Prairies*. As late as 1901, when nearing his sixty-fifth birthday, he published a sixteen-page booklet of poems which he called *In Occident and Orient Equal Rights for Black and White*, containing one long and several short poems in defense of the Negro.

His poems consisted of occasional verse, patriotic lyrics, topographical verses designedly following the eighteenth century John Dyer in his "Grongar Hill",¹⁷ but descriptive of Iowa, odes, a few narrative poems concerning the Indians, and, frequently, club-swinging and bitterly polemic defenses of the common man.

¹⁶ See Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1868 edition), Preface, pp. vi, vii.

¹⁷ Leonard Brown's *Iowa The Promised of the Prophets, and Other Patriotic Poems*, p. 12.

Outstanding in his *Poems of the Prairies* of 1865 are two long poems — “Iowa The Past” and “Iowa The Present”. Fourteen years later in his *Iowa The Promised of the Prophets*, he added a third canto which he called “Iowa The Future”. As he clearly stated in his first verses in his “Iowa The Past” he desired to sing for the Indians, whose history fascinated him,

A mournful, melancholy lay —
The dirge of a departed day.

Drawing from his personal knowledge of wandering bands of the Sauk and Fox and from his reading of Drake’s *Life of Black Hawk*, he composed a series of loosely connected lyrics. One represents the mourning of the wife and the mother of a Fox warrior who had been killed in battle; another is the elegy for the same warrior sung by a chorus of Indian maidens. Still other poems give pictures of Indian councils where tribal chiefs outboasted other leaders concerning their deeds of prowess,

Portraying how they battles gained,
Or how the Bison’s blood they drained,
Or how the bow from crag on high,
Brought down the eagle bold to die.

His “Iowa The Present” pictures the poet as musing upon the banks of the Des Moines River. Quite appropriately he retained for the Skunk and the Raccoon rivers their more euphonious Indian names of Chicaqua and Asipala. The last lyric in “Iowa The Present” bursts into a pæan of praise for his adopted State. In it he does not hesitate to employ the idiom of the romantic poets, on which he had been bred.

“O, I have found the beauteous one —
The fairest land beneath the sun!” . . .
She is the garden of the earth!

How very wise in all her laws!
 How glorious in Freedom's cause!

These verses, written when Brown was in the early twenties, are the expression of the youthful idealist, and were published in the first flush of victory for the North.

Leonard Brown reprinted both "Iowa The Past" and "Iowa The Present" in his *Iowa The Promised of the Prophets* of 1884, but his third canto, "Iowa The Future", suggests the mind of a partially disillusioned man of forty-two. In this, he abandoned lyrical moods to proclaim in vigorous language a new day for labor and to denounce capitalistic wealth, but he retained enough of his early idealism to look forward to halycon days when the State would be "eyes to the blind" and when justice and law would be widespread enough

To enforce these rights and give
 Their benefits to all that live.

His *Poems of the Prairies* and his *Iowa The Promised of the Prophets* both contain occasional poems of local interest, such as his lines "To Keokuk" and a legendary tale of "Pash-a-pa-ho",¹⁸ a Sauk chief. In the latter, imitating with creditable success the meter of Longfellow's *Evangeline*, he tells a fictitious story of the last stand of the "Sauks and Musquakies" against the Sioux in a battle which he says was fought near the site of Adel in 1842. Brown gives the following gory description of the aged chief Pash-a-pa-ho on the eve of this legendary battle:

¹⁸ The poem "Pash-a-Pa-Ho" appears only in the 1879 edition of Brown's *Poems of the Prairies*, pp. 215-229. This story is a very garbled account of a battle between the Sioux and the Ioway in which the Ioway were almost destroyed. The battle occurred not long before 1828 not 1842.—For the two incidents which are confused in this poem see A. R. Fulton's *The Red Men of Iowa*, pp. 118-122, 248-252. Black Hawk in his *Autobiography*, pp. 82, 83, tells of delivering a hostage to the Ioway, but says the young man was released and that not one of the Ioways had been killed since that time by the Sauk and Fox.

Four score winters have frosted the scalp-lock of brave Pash-a-pa-
ho;

Twenty-four pale-faces have paled 'neath the blows of his hatchet;
Seventy-two Dakotas have yielded their lives to his valor;
Ninety-six ugly scalps he wears 'round his neck as a garland.

Not infrequently Brown addressed some of his occasional verse to relatives, friends, and the builders of Iowa with whom he was personally acquainted. To his patron, B. F. Allen, he dedicated an ode entitled "Wealth and Happiness". In it he paid Allen the highest tribute in his power, for he ascribed to him the life purposes which Brown himself set up as his life ideal and which he himself had acquired from his mother and from the Reverend John Anson Nash,

God has assigned us work to do:—
To make the world the better and the wiser
*And the happier for our living in it.*¹⁹

In 1876 he was invited to write a centenary poem for a celebration to be held in Polk City, Iowa. In it he imitated quite successfully the short lines and the repetitive refrains of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. Though at places the lines scarcely escape doggerel, he has preserved the names and memories of Polk County pioneers and painted pictures of the vanishing homespun amusements of the prairie. He recalled the chair factory and the hotel of Ives Marks at Polk City.

And his hotel on the corner,
And his twenty-five cent dinners,
With "corn bread and common doin's" —
And his half-a-dollar dinners,
With "wheat bread and chicken fixin's,"
Giving to the hungry traveler

¹⁹ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), p. 131. The italics are Brown's.

Bill of fare and choice of dishes,
And due notice as to prices.²⁰

He did not forget John C. Bennett, famous in the agricultural annals of Iowa and the nation for his participation in "hen fever", an epithet applied to an earnest endeavor to import better breeds of chickens from Spain, China, and the south seas.

Champion of Shanghai chickens —
Writing volumes about chickens, . . .
And the nation now is debtor
To the Doctor for big chickens;
And the preachers all are debtor
To the Doctor for good chickens —
For the yellow-legged chickens.²¹

In this centennial poem he recalled the homespun amusements of Iowa's early days which he had enjoyed at his father's home and in the days when he had "boarded 'round" with his school patrons.

With the spelling-schools of those days,
And such spellers as Ab. Van Dorn;
With the singing-schools of those days,
Taught by Herbert — singing-master;
With the rosy girls of those days,
In their handsome linsey dresses;
With the quilting-bees of those days,

²⁰ The poem "Big Creek" appears only in the 1879 edition of *Poems of the Prairies*, pp. 215-228. Under the caption, "Auld Lang Syne", this poem was printed in J. M. Dixon's *Centennial History of Polk County, Iowa*. It may be interesting to note that Polk City near which Leonard Brown's father owned a farm was built on an old Indian village and was called Wawponsee. According to legend the early settlers used part of the Indian houses to build their first homes.— J. M. Dixon's *Centennial History of Polk County, Iowa*, p. 72. Fulton in his *Red Men of Iowa*, pp. 278-280, reprints a list of 157 Sauk and Fox "Chiefs and Braves" which had been copied by Leonard Brown verbatim in 1857 from a day-book in the possession of Benjamin Bryant of Des Moines. Leonard Brown printed the same list in the appendix of the 1879 edition of his *Poems of the Prairies*, pp. 67, 68.

²¹ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), pp. 223, 224.

And the kissing-bees of those days,
And the sparking and the hoe-downs,
And the rousing big camp-meetings,
And the pentecostal shouting.²²

The hope of progress, so abundant in many lives spent on the frontier, served to develop in young Leonard Brown a buoyant optimism but failed to prepare the maturing Leonard Brown for the agricultural and industrial unrest of the eighties and the nineties. The railroads, which had been heralded as the promoters of western wealth, turned monopolistic and the economic unbalance threatened the farmers of the Midwest with foreclosure and poverty. At the same time, industrial workers began clamoring for the "full dinner pail". In this dilemma Leonard Brown turned his pen to vigorous verse and prose polemics for the reforms demanded by the leaders of the Greenback and the Populist parties. The slender, lyrical gift which he possessed became lost in the bitterness of invectives. A few of the poems in the *Poems of the Prairies* point in this direction. Many more appear in *Iowa The Promised of the Prophets*. Such poems he continued to write and he scattered them freely throughout his sermons and lectures.

As has been apparent from the selections already introduced, Leonard Brown cannot be rated as a true poet, one who fuses ideas, emotions, and artistry into a complete whole. His poems, like so many other things in his life, failed to reach the level which he had mapped out for himself. On two scores, however, he deserves to be credited with two forward-looking critical theories in writing and in art. When he wrote his *Poems of the Prairies* he would have been non-plussed by the term regionalism, yet unconsciously he placed himself in the van of Midwest artists and writers who desired to express the universal through

²² Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), pp. 218, 219.

the medium of local color; and in the second place he sought consciously to free poetry from the strangling bands of European and English models of art.

Before Hamlin Garland had published his iconoclastic *Crumbling Idols* and had set himself the task of picturing Iowa mud, Iowa farm yards, and the eviction of Iowa farmers by usurious landlords in his *Main Travelled Roads*, Leonard Brown advocated the use of native material in verse and in art. He wrote: "Encourage Iowa talent and leave the Italian to ply his vocation of artist in Italy. Let the ceilings and walls of our public buildings exhibit only the handicraft of Iowa artists, and our public libraries be filled to overflowing with the work of Iowa authors especially." His loyalty to Iowa is manifest in the statement, "God has done more for Iowa (the loveliest land embraced by the grandest rivers) than for any other land on earth — let her own people do their part to encourage Art and Literature at home and her name will be exalted."²³

Although his first published venture was in verse, Leonard Brown began, soon after the close of the Civil War, to turn his attention to prose. The first of his many books and tracts, he called *American Patriotism*, published in 1869. The book, he said, was a monument in memory of the deceased soldiers of Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa, who had lost their lives in the Civil War, a "book about 'common men' — in our 'land of the people'".²⁴

On this self-imposed task he busied himself for more than two years and a half, pouring over old newspapers and government files, and, generally on foot, making house-to-house visitations both in Des Moines itself and in the outlying farms and villages of Polk County, gathering personal

²³ See the Preface to *Iowa The Promised of the Prophets*, p. 8.

²⁴ Leonard Brown's *American Patriotism; or, Memoirs of "Common Men"*, Preface, p. v. The volume was printed by Redhead and Wellslager, Des Moines, 1869.

data from family Bibles, from letters written by soldiers, and from notes written and directed to fathers or mothers or wives by officers, friends, or nurses. He dedicated this book to his brother, Harvey Brown, who enlisted in Company D of the Second Iowa Infantry and served the entire period of the Civil War.

Leonard Brown looked upon his task of preparing the memorials and addresses as a sacred duty. He also insisted that each township should preserve the records of its soldiers. Scornful of what he considered lesser literary activities, he wrote with his usual conviction: "The shelves of the bookstores are bending under their loads of printed and bound volumes of vain imaginings of sickly minds and corrupt hearts — *novels*. Shame on the people who read such trash, if one who lost his life for the Union shall be forgotten."²⁵

Roughly he divided his *American Patriotism* into three parts. The Introduction, unnecessarily long, rambling, and rather desultory, was interspersed with patriotic, dedicatory, and memorial addresses culled from newspapers. The second and historically speaking the most valuable of the three, contains excerpts from letters and brief biographies of the soldiers who had died either in service or as a result of their service. The third section, covering ninety-two pages, an "Index and Record", contained as complete a list of the names and records of the veterans of Des Moines and Polk County as the tireless labors of Leonard Brown could assemble.

The hundreds of letters which Leonard Brown examined would, if they were still extant, prove a treasure trove to the historian interested in Iowa's contribution to the Civil War. From some he took factual data, from others expressions of intense loyalty and patriotism, and from some

²⁵ Brown's *American Patriotism*, p. 75.

notes of pathos. For example, Oliver Perry Kelley closed a letter written to his parents on June 27, 1864 (just before an engagement in Paulding County, Georgia), with the promise, "When the fight is over I will write you again." To this excerpt Brown added the succinct sentence, "When the fight was over, Kelley was dead." Other excerpts from letters and diaries tell of amputations, illnesses in camp, and long marches, fatherly counsels sent to minor children and messages of love and confidence addressed to mothers and wives, and patriotic pledges. In 1863 John Wilson Trent sent a letter to his home in Saylor Grove near Des Moines, in which he said: "If the war ends soon, we will have a good time cheering the Stars and Stripes as we go home; and if it don't end soon, we will cheer it anyhow." In point of fact he did neither, for he died from wounds on July 25th, 1863, following an amputation.²⁶

Brown devoted several pages to the war career of Marcellus M. Crocker, the brilliant young Des Moines lawyer, whose death from disease on August 26, 1865, brought grief to Des Moines and the State of Iowa. Brown quotes Crocker as saying, when he was urged to return home in the summer of 1862 on account of ill-health and the delay in the Senate's approval of his commission as brigadier general, "Come what may, I will stand by the old flag till the end."²⁷ When news of Crocker's death at Washington, D. C., reached Des Moines, Leonard Brown dedicated the following patriotic sonnet to Crocker's memory.

How bright a record this brave man has made!
 The hero stood midst shot and bursting shell
 Unharm'd. Where "Death reigned king" and thousands fell,
 On high he wielded his victorious blade.

²⁶ Brown's *American Patriotism*, pp. 75-77, 83, 91, 146, 338.

²⁷ Brown's *American Patriotism*, p. 103; Andrews's *Pioneers of Polk County, Iowa*, Vol. II, p. 151. Crocker's statue is one of the four equestrian figures at the base of the Soldiers' Monument at Des Moines.

But now aside he has the saber laid,
And gone, in everlasting peace to dwell.
Had he not lived and fought, ah! who can tell
If e'en to-day would War's red tide be stayed!
His prowess won the field at Champion Hill
And ope'd the way for Vicksburg to be ta'en;
And it was his indomitable will
That saved the day, when Lauman's braves were slain —
But now our country's saved and peace is won;
Brave Crocker has gone home; his work is done.²⁸

American Patriotism cost Leonard Brown more than the long hours of work spent in collecting his materials and in writing. His patron, B. F. Allen, who had aided him in publishing his *Poems of the Prairies* four years before, was skeptical concerning the financial success of the book and agreed to advance the money for its publication only on condition that Leonard Brown and his wife mortgage their home to secure the loan. This they did. The edition of fifteen hundred copies cost a dollar a volume. He hoped to sell them at \$3.50 each, but the book did not sell well and it looked for a time as if the Browns would have to leave their home in Des Moines. Three years later, however, by way of extreme economy and by selling other Des Moines property, the debt, except for about three hundred dollars, was liquidated.²⁹

Margaret Cory Brown had been a strong Methodist and it had been her custom to gather her children about her twice daily for family prayers.³⁰ Though Leonard Brown was only eleven when his mother died, he had acquired

²⁸ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1865 edition), p. [162]. The poem was written four days after Crocker's death.

²⁹ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", pp. 49-51.

³⁰ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", p. 18. See also his sonnet, "Mother", in the 1865 edition of *Poems of the Prairies*, p. 11.

familiarity with the Bible and throughout his life he interspersed his essays, lectures, and sermons with quotations from the Scriptures. Intense and introspective by nature, Leonard Brown found many intellectual and spiritual problems in religion, but he was too individualistic to accept without question all the precepts and beliefs of the orthodox Protestantism of that day and sometime before his marriage in 1861 he had become a Universalist.

Nancy Jane Houston, like Leonard's mother, was a Methodist, and in deference to her wishes and, perhaps, to remove some of her family's objections to the marriage, Brown considered joining "an evangelical church", but even as he made this resolution he insisted on several stipulations. He wrote a letter to the Reverend Joshua F. M. Chamberlain, pastor of the Congregational Church in Des Moines in which he said: "I believe that it is man's duty to worship God; that the Scriptures are true; that Jesus is the Son of God; that he died for sinners; that the wicked shall not go unpunished . . . I like the democratic form of your church government." But he added: "Does your church require its members to subscribe to a long confession of faith? I wish to have my mind untrammelled, that I may fully investigate, before I subscribe to a long creed gotten up a century or two ago . . . for you know some church organizations are prisons for the mind."³¹

The answer to the letter was, apparently, unsatisfactory to Brown for not long afterwards he contemplated joining the Baptist Church of Reverend John Anson Nash. In 1866 he did ally himself temporarily with the Methodist Episcopal Church but chafing under its restrictions and probably critical of the episcopal form of its government he soon threw in his lot with the Unitarians of Iowa, and

³¹ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", pp. 45, 46, 47.

for a time hoped to become a minister in that church.³² Indeed he never fully relinquished a persistent and recurring belief that his life work lay in the church.

In 1869 at the age of thirty-two, after his failure to be reëlected county superintendent and the meager financial returns from the sale of his books, he began to hope that he might find an acceptable place among the Unitarians. He entered into correspondence with Reverend N. Seaver, Jr., pastor of the Unitarian Church in Davenport, and he attended a Unitarian Conference held at Geneseo, Illinois, in 1870. There he talked to the field secretaries of the East and the West and was given what he considered "positive assurance" that he would be employed by the American Unitarian Association of Boston to carry on missionary work in Iowa, and he was also given to understand that he might expect financial aid for this undertaking.³³ With his usual zeal he began preaching wherever he could find listeners but the promised financial aid failed to materialize.

In 1873 he gathered together the sermons which seemed best to him and at his own expense published them under the title of *Things New and Old or Christianity and Liberty*.³⁴ About the same time he also sent to press an iconoclastic pamphlet on *The Rights of Labor, An Essay in Political Reform*, the first of a half dozen virulent tracts decrying capitalists, monopolistic controls, and the resulting oppression which he felt was grinding into servitude the agricultural and industrial laborers of America.

Brown desperately hoped that *Things New and Old* would appeal to Unitarian leaders in the East; he hoped to establish a missionary Unitarian church in Des Moines

³² Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", pp. 47, 49.

³³ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", p. 55.

³⁴ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", pp. 58, 59. No copy of this book of sermons has been located.

and become its leader. In 1875, when he was thirty-eight and the father of eight children, he wrote to Unitarian leaders in Boston asking for their opinion on his proposed plan of undertaking theological courses at either Meadville or Harvard in preparation for this work. Rush R. Shipton of Boston, who had approved *Things New and Old*, replied that in his opinion the writer's talents in writing and speaking fitted him far better for ministering to congregations in the new West rather than in the East and he added, perhaps as a sop to Cerberus, that Brown's excellent sermons indicated that neither Meadville nor Harvard had much to offer him either in philosophy or theology.

About this time Leonard Brown was temporarily relieved of his financial worries; he was offered the chair of Latin Literature and Language at Humboldt College, Humboldt, a poverty-ridden school in northwestern Iowa, which at the time was being sponsored by the Unitarians. He eagerly accepted the offer and leaving his wife and his brood of eight children on a small farm near Polk City, he entered upon his work in September, 1875. Fortunately he was able to earn thirty dollars by helping the Reverend Julius Stevens conduct a teachers' institute before the beginning of the school year. Most conscientiously Leonard Brown taught his classes syntax and literature and preached zealously every Sunday night. Although he was happy with his teaching and preaching, he soon met two additional disappointments. Reverend Taft, through no fault of his own, was unable to pay Brown the promised salary except in the form of a promissory note due in February, 1876, and, in addition, he objected to Brown's out-spoken opinions on the rights of labor and the encroachments of capital. As a result Brown's connection with Humboldt College ended on November 24, 1875.³⁵

³⁵ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", p. 54.

Forced to return to Des Moines at Christmas time empty-handed and greatly in need of money, Brown revived his pleas for substantial aid for forwarding his cherished project of making Des Moines a center of Unitarianism in Iowa. Finally, on December 1, 1876, "a cold hard letter" came from F. F. Moors, Greenfield, Massachusetts. With apparent reluctance, Moors frankly informed Brown that his radicalism, especially in respect to the private ownership of property as expressed by him in his *Rights of Labor*, would not be acceptable to Unitarian congregations. "New England Unitarianism", he wrote, "is on the whole quite conservative. The laymen especially so." He added: "For your sake and for the sake of the work you would do, I wish you held more moderate opinions." This letter, with a subsequent one from R. R. Shipton, put an end to his dream of becoming a Unitarian leader in Iowa.³⁶

Brown admitted that this news fell upon his heart "like an iron-wedge". Discouraged for a time but undaunted, he gave himself for more than two decades to a fight for the underprivileged, still definitely conscious of the feeling that Divine Destiny was shaping his life. He wrote: "God has kept me poor that I may know what to say for the poor man — know by experience his wrongs and be ready to fight for the cause of the common people". Still later in commenting on his rejections by the Unitarians, with covert criticism of the church he wrote: "since that day I have delivered over three hundred speeches against the oppressions of capital that has seized control of every corporation (the Church included) as well as of the State itself."³⁷

Leonard Brown also fought for the cause of temperance.

³⁶ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", pp. 59, 60.

³⁷ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", pp. 55, 60. In 1878 Brown published a pamphlet entitled *A Modest Inquiry into the History, Nature and Office of Money*.

Before he was out of his teens, he joined the newly organized Independent Order of Good Templars in Des Moines. From then on he followed closely the ups and downs of temperance legislation. In 1855 when he was eighteen the General Assembly passed a State prohibition law, modeled upon the Maine Law. The legislature of 1857 modified this statute to permit the sale of beer, ale, and light wines. As the liquor question found its way into politics with a new prohibition law in 1884 and the Mule Law of 1894, Brown loudly raised his voice against the saloon and the liquor traffic. Personally both liquor and tobacco were offensive to him. In 1861 he wrote to Nancy Jane Houston: "I have never been found in a tippling shop or in a house of ill fame. I am free from intemperate habits. I am not a defamer of God. I love a good name and have tried to merit it."³⁸

Twice because of his outspoken and violent speeches, mobs threatened his life. The first of these occurred in 1861; a second happened in July of 1883 when Leonard Brown was demanding that more action should be taken in tracking down the murderers of Mayor R. W. Stubb of Polk City. As the story is recalled by one of Leonard Brown's daughters, some close friends met Brown in the village of Polk City, told him that certain men had planned to ambush him on his way home that night, and earnestly begged him to remain in town. When he refused to comply, one interested friend put his own revolver in Brown's pocket. Forewarned, Brown was alert to unusual sounds, and when he heard a crackling in some bushes a short ways up the road, he aimed the pistol at the stars and fired. Apparently sur-

³⁸ When Leonard Brown published the 1879 edition of *Poems of the Prairies*, under the general heading of "Recollections", he added over forty pages of his own love letters addressed to Nancy Jane Houston, written between July 20, 1860, and November 7, 1861, when he finally won the hand of Nancy in marriage.

prised, the men fled precipitately. When Leonard Brown examined the rendezvous he found a cache of early summer apples and eggs in very usable condition. Staggering under his load he made his way home and laughingly presented the loot to his family.³⁹

Leonard Brown was as adamantly opposed to the use of tobacco as he was to intoxicants. One of his granddaughters recalls her embarrassment when, as a child, she was once walking up Walnut Street in Des Moines with him. Suddenly he stopped a young man on the sidewalk, jerked a lighted cigarette from his mouth, and in a loud voice proceeded to deliver before the young man an impromptu lecture upon the evils of nicotine. One of the younger Brown sons declared that because of his father's violent distaste for liquor and tobacco he never felt able to drink the mildest cocktail and actually envied men who could obtain enjoyment from their pipes.⁴⁰

Leonard Brown's first two editions of *Poems of the Prairies* contain a long poem on "Intemperance" in which he scorned legislators who were unwilling to pass liquor laws with enforcement clauses in them. In his last book, *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be*, written in his seventy-second year, he could look optimistically into the future of America when youths would become too intelligent to think of poisoning their bodies with tobacco or alcohol. With an American Utopia in mind, he wrote: "He is unwise who will hereafter invest money in establishing breweries or distilleries in the United States. . . . I believe a half century hence they will all have run their course, been closed and utterly done away, as now they have been and are in several

³⁹ Paul Walter Black's "Attempted Lynchings in Iowa" in *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. XI, pp. 271, 277; personal letter from Mrs. L. E. Jensen, granddaughter of Leonard Brown and daughter of Mrs. James M. Graham (Kate Brown Graham).

⁴⁰ Personal letter from Mrs. L. E. Jensen.

states of our Union. And by A. D. 2000 tobacco will cease to be cultivated, for no one will then poison his physical being with it." Yet, apparently contradicting this prophecy, he felt it necessary to print the following exhortation: "Let the saloon be anathematized in the prayers of every good man and good woman — nor can language be too terrible in denunciation of the abominable hell into which so many fall as into the crater of a volcano." For several years during the nineties he was a weekly contributor to the *New York Voice*, the national organ of the temperance movement.⁴¹

Other social and economic problems appealed to Leonard Brown's crusading spirit. During the last decades of the nineteenth century the Middle West was undergoing a series of economic crises which baffled even the thoughtful lawmakers of the land and which made the burdens of the agricultural, factory, and mine worker almost intolerable. Pioneer farmers had anticipated the coming of the railroad as the open avenue to success, but exorbitant freight rates and discrimination between the long and short hauls now hindered them in the marketing of their crops. The mortgage holders with their high rates of interest bestrode the farmers. The latter rose in rebellion, organized the Granger movement and began to ally themselves with the Greenback and later with the Populist parties. These farmers and the underpaid industrial workers became the radicals of the day.

In Leonard Brown they found a man who sincerely believed in the rights which the farmers and laboring men were demanding and who spoke with the conviction of an old Hebrew prophet because he believed he was divinely commissioned to redress the wrongs of all the underprivileged. In his journal under the date of July 7, 1884, he

⁴¹ Leonard Brown's *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be*, pp. 57, 81; "The Life and Death of Leonard Brown" in *The Register and Leader* (Des Moines), September 2, 1914.

wrote, "How little one seems to accomplish and yet how much may result finally from the work and thought of a single obscure individual! I feel that I have assigned me by the Good Angels and God himself a great work to do for humanity. . . . I desire nothing for myself but to give my life, if need be, for the common cause." And with something of the accent of Amos and Jeremiah he continued, "I will tell the truth as I see it, if I suffer death for it. I do not expect to be a popular favorite. On the contrary, the very people whom I would serve assail me. I have been waylaid and my life and good name put in jeopardy, because I would speak the truth as I saw it. But the battle must be fought — the example must be set of devotion to truth and contempt of popular applause and of wealth. Progress can only result to-day from self-sacrifice as of old."

In this journal he set forth his credo for society. "The need of the age is the proper regulation of the relations of society and labor. Under the old condition of things, when agriculture was the chief pursuit, when great factories were unknown, then each had abundant to do and there was no enforced idleness. Now men and women are herded together in the factories, subject to an 'employer'. The people must become their own employers. A curb must be put on Avarice. Greed must be chained. We must reach the people somehow with these ideas. No political party is yet ready to declare for co-operative industry. We do cry 'protection'. We must enlarge the meaning of the word. We must go to the help of the workers — and not of speculators. Laborers must not look to private capitalists for employment. Capital is labor's product. There will be no destitution when the laborers control the products of their toil. The people are not entirely ignorant of these ideas that must save them. The Grange was a great school. Let all the

workers join in one grand 'Union'. Reforms must result from diffusion of correct ideas. We must agitate — striking boldly for truth and right. Co-operation is the key to the Kingdom of Heaven. It means 'help one another' — or, rather, 'love one another'. It is true Christianity put in practice."⁴²

Ambitions and ideas for social betterment burned in his mind. Often at night he arose to put on paper the thoughts which kept him from sleep. He held infinite scorn for chicanery, graft, and political dishonesty, and he was particularly enraged when such corruption made life intolerable for the underprivileged. He expressed his creed in the following verses.

Soon the battle will begin
Gainst the giant powers of Sin;
See the cause of God succeed!
Righteousness will conquer Greed;
Private wealth will be unknown
In the day that hastens on —
Private capital no more
Shall enslave the toiling poor;
All the land will then be tilled
By the owners of the field;
Their own hands will plow and sow;
Their own hands will reap and mow —
Soon will perish Tenantry;
Rent will die with Usury; . . .
The fundamental law shall be:
"Love, Peace and Uniformity."⁴³

In the 1870's Leonard Brown and his wife moved their family of ten children from Des Moines to a farm of some

⁴² Fragment of a manuscript autobiography of Leonard Brown in possession of his daughter, Mrs. James M. Graham of Audubon. It runs from July 3, 1884, to February 11, 1885.

⁴³ Leonard Brown's "The Edict of Labor" in *Iowa The Promised of the Prophets* (1884), pp. 68-72.

eight acres, near Polk City, fourteen miles from the capital. He wanted his children, he said, to grow up close to nature. At first he kept a subscription school but his radical views on property antagonized the students and patrons.⁴⁴ When he could obtain the necessary recommendation, he taught in adjacent rural schools. Although he was not a farmer by choice, he cultivated every inch of his few acres and was able to produce most of the staple articles of food for his growing family. From this cabin home, as he called it, he often walked the fourteen miles to Des Moines to speak in favor of prohibition or for the Greenback Party.

In the decade of the eighteen eighties he published three books of a socialistic nature — *Money and Labor*, in 1880, *Protection and Free Trade*, in 1888, and *The Pending Conflict*, in 1890. Poorly printed, these appeared in pamphlet form or in cheap board covers. All were published in Des Moines.

In *Money and Labor* he pleaded for the chief tenet of the Greenback Party that paper money should be placed on a par with gold. By analogy he reasoned, "If the American people were obliged by law to make all instruments of gold and silver and all household utensils, it would be no greater folly to submit to such a law than to a law compelling them to make their only legal tender money, to-day, of gold and silver." "The public interest", he asserted, "demands that Banking, Insurance, and Railroad corporations, land monopoly, and manufacturing monopolies be suppressed, and the government assume control of these interests".⁴⁵

Protection and Free Trade was a more ambitious project. In this eighty-page tract he begged for protection for the

⁴⁴ Personal letter from Mrs. L. E. Jensen; Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", p. 58.

⁴⁵ Leonard Brown's *Money and Labor*, pp. 12, 33, 34. This little book is composed of three lectures delivered in 1875, 1876, and 1878. To these he added fifteen pages of political verse, most of which had been previously published.

laborer. The home market should be preserved and should bring profit to the home producer. He did not want to see cheap goods enter the United States and threaten labor in this country.

In *The Pending Conflict Between the Masses and the Classes* and in *Popular Perils* Brown wrote of the broadening cleavage between the monopolist and the wage worker. He earnestly pleaded for coöperation, an intelligent willingness on the part of both capital and labor to face facts and meet issues. To define the phrase, "co-operative effort", which he so often used he borrowed a definition from a current issue of the *New Review* (English). "The co-operative principle is distinct from the socialistic or anarchial theories, yet it goes a long way. The advocate of equity to labor maintains labor to be the industrious man's capital, and that it should be respected like the rich man's capital, and rewarded like it." Throughout *The Pending Conflict*, he continued his exhortations for producers, farmers, and wage-workers — the patriots of America — to unite. He denounced capital and monopoly, advocated the union of farmers, and insisted that a just share of the earnings of industry should go to labor. He looked forward optimistically to a Utopia in the future. "The 'perfect commonwealth'", he wrote, "will be but the unfoldment of Christianity — the crystalization (through a fraternal association of the world's workers), of the ideas revealed in the Sermon of Jesus on the Mount, into the pre-ordained, universal Christian republic, the UNITED STATES OF THE WORLD."⁴⁶

Popular Perils (1892) appeared on the eve of the 1893 depression, although some of the essays in it had appeared earlier. The great contest, he said, lay between two great

⁴⁶ Leonard Brown's *The Pending Conflict Between the Masses and the Classes*, prefatory "Note to the Reader" and pp. 4, 7, 35.

classes — those who live by investments of money and those who live by labor, between speculators and toilers. Most firmly he believed that the world was “advancing toward the goal of socialism”. The socialism of Europe, he said, would be autocratic; that of America democratic. He advocated that the workers, once they gained control, should repeal all class laws, demonetize gold, establish a governmental loan office, institute the subtreasury system, provide for government control of the railroads, institute coöperative industries, abrogate private ownership of all mineral, coal, and oil lands, and limit the private ownership of agricultural lands to a reasonable homestead for each farmer.⁴⁷ Free enterprise had failed, he thought, and he was quite ready to throw in his lot with the Populist Party.

The intrinsic value of these tracts, in so far as literature and economic theory are concerned, is inconsequential. They show familiarity with past and current theories concerning money, banking, and legislation, including the single tax theory of Henry George which Brown violently opposed. The permanent value which his books possess lies historically in their revelation of the strong discontent which existed throughout the seventies, eighties, and the nineties among farmers and laboring men, and the prevalence of radicalism. As a revelation of the character of Leonard Brown they exhibit his sympathy with the wage-worker and the anomalous situation of a man who was habitually “a poor provider” for his own family and yet thought himself capable of righting the economic wrongs of the nation.

Party allegiance with Leonard Brown was always a matter of principle. He voted for the political party with whose platform he could intellectually agree. His first vote, he cast for Lincoln. Later when the farmers were passing

⁴⁷ Brown's *Popular Perils*, p. 181, 183.

from their maximum prosperity of the Civil and post-Civil War period he wrote and talked and argued for the Greenback Party. At times, he championed the Prohibition ticket and he tried repeatedly to introduce prohibition planks into the Greenback Party platforms.⁴⁸

Brown's greatest contribution to the Greenback Party came from the dissemination of his tracts and books on economic issues of that day, but he also took part in party activities in a minor rôle. In the first Greenback State convention held at Des Moines in 1876 he was placed on the resolutions committee and on the State central committee, representing the seventh congressional district. At this convention he was nominated as the Greenback Party's candidate for Secretary of State. His old friend and mentor, John A. Nash, was the candidate named for Superintendent of Public Instruction. In 1878 he was a member of the credentials committee of the State convention and is credited with having written the Greenbackers' State platform for that year. In December, 1878, Brown attended a "Greenback Conference" held at Des Moines to consider fusion and in 1881 he was one of the convention speakers.⁴⁹

Brown's facile pen, intense convictions, and emotional power over audiences made him a desirable promoter in furthering the tenets of the Greenback Party, but his refusal to compromise soon interfered with his allegiance. In the campaign of 1880 he wrote a number of letters which were published in *The Iowa State Register*. In these Brown protested against the policy adopted by the Greenback Party's leaders, but still insisted he was a loyal Greenbacker. The letter which appeared on August 6th drew this

⁴⁸ "The Life and Death of Leonard Brown" in *The Register and Leader* (Des Moines), September 2, 1914.

⁴⁹ Clyde O. Ruggles's "The Greenback Movement in Iowa", Ch. III; Fred E. Haynes's *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War*, pp. 161, 168, 181.

editorial comment, probably from the pen of J. S. Clarkson, an old friend of Leonard Brown's: "The Greenback party of Des Moines and Central Iowa was originally led by honest men, principally by intelligent farmers . . . Gradually their places have been taken by the loafers of the town and the city, by broken-down or played out preachers, by repudiated office-seekers, and by that whole class of town and city gentry who think there is a way in this world to make a living without working for it."⁵⁰

For a time after this break with the Greenbackers Brown appears to have realigned himself with the Republican Party, for in 1884 when James G. Blaine was a candidate for President, the Republican national committee sent him as far east as Massachusetts where "he stumped an entire district".⁵¹

In the early nineties Leonard Brown witnessed the union of the malcontents and liberals — representatives of the Greenbackers, the Farmers' Alliance, the Knights of Labor, the Grange, and various labor parties — in the People's Party which held its first State convention in Iowa in Des Moines in June, 1891. Brown is not mentioned in connection with this convention, but in July, 1892, he sat on the platform at a reception given by the People's Party in honor of James B. Weaver and he was present at the State convention held in August to nominate a State ticket.⁵² With many of the tenets of the People's Party or Populists, Leonard Brown had already expressed approval in his *Popular Perils* published in 1892. He championed free silver and expressed scorn for capitalists and for lawyers

⁵⁰ Haynes's *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War*, p. 177; *Iowa State Weekly Register* (Des Moines), August 6, 1880.

⁵¹ *The Register and Leader* (Des Moines), September 2, 1914.

⁵² Ruggles's "The Greenback Movement in Iowa", Ch. XVII; Haynes's *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War*, pp. 324, 325.

who made the laws which continued to oppress the poor. The depression of 1893 fomented general unrest in Iowa and the Midwest.

As a politician, however, Leonard Brown was a failure. He held too firmly to his individual opinions and had too fiery and vituperative a tongue to work with men who differed from him ideologically.⁵³ He emphasized the differences between him and his associates rather than the points of agreement. He was always ready to express his own views, but less willing to look objectively at the ideas of others.

Social and economic equality was a closely held tenet of Leonard Brown's. He denounced slavery as un-Christian and advocated the admission of Negroes into the ranks of labor on equal terms with white people. Both *The Pending Conflict* and *Popular Perils* contain chapters devoted to the rights of the freedmen. The American Negro, Brown felt, had been discriminated against in the Spanish-American War and he wrote:

He that insults a veteran, battle-scarred,
Because his blood is not pure Anglo-Saxon,
Insults the flag that veteran bled to uphold.⁵⁴

In 1908 Leonard Brown gave to the public *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be*, the book which he considered his masterpiece. Printed by the E. T. Meredith Company in Des Moines on good paper, it ran to more than six hundred pages. The frontispiece pictures Brown, then in his seventy-second year, as a venerable old man with flowing white hair and a neatly trimmed white beard, seated in an arm

⁵³ Take for instance the following quotation: "Leonard Brown obtained the floor and 'paralyzed the convention with a rabid socialistic speech, teeming with paternal suggestions and common weal sentiments.'"—Haynes's *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War*, p. 346. This incident occurred at an Interstate Silver Conference held in Des Moines on March 21, 22, 1894.

⁵⁴ In *Occident and Orient Equal Rights of Blacks and Whites*.

chair with his eyes intent on a book. Under his name on the title page are the words, "Ye Olden Schoolmaster of Ye Olden Time. His Book." Below this runs a quotation from Tolstoi, selected because it most significantly expressed the author's aim in preparing the book: "All literary works are good and useful, not when they describe what has taken place, but when they show what ought to be."

In *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be*, Brown tried, sometimes in a matter-of-fact manner and sometimes in prophetic language, to suggest ways of improving education, liquor laws, and the equable distribution of wealth for the future Columbia of his grandchildren and their grandchildren. In it he reprinted many of his early sermons and many of his social tracts and supplied 290 "Lessons", essays, and verses which had hitherto never been printed. Though his convictions remained very intense, *Our Own Columbia*, comparatively speaking, represents a less antagonistic and a more mellowed attitude toward society than was evident in *The Pending Conflict* and *Popular Perils*. More pronounced was the emphasis on Christian ethics, the idea that in the love and justice for all men taught in the gospels and in the letters of Paul lay the only permanent solution of national problems.

In the Preface to *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be*, Brown briefly described what he believed is man's purpose for existence in the civilized world. He wrote: "Yes, man has a work given him to do superior to this [animal instincts and behavior]. What is it? Briefly, it is 'to save the world.' Save it from what? (1) From ignorance; (2) from want; and (3) from wrong-doing. But mainly from ignorance; for want and wrong-doing flow from ignorance." He insisted that a thorough education of the public would do away with four gigantic evils — liquor, tobacco, houses of ill-fame, and divorce. Throughout the book, denunciations

of capital, the high ideals of the Sermon on the Mount, and the hope of a labor-dominated society constantly elbow one another. With a far look into a utopian future he visioned the day when there would be one class, that of toilers, and one religion, which would embrace the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; there would be no wars, and, finally, enlightened intelligence would bring a new sense of the value of labor.

Upon the receipt of a presentation copy of *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be*, James S. Clarkson, of the Des Moines *Register*, sent the following tribute to Leonard Brown: "The preface to your book . . . reveals your own nature and soul and your whole ambition in life, and is an echo of all your work for the benefit of your fellow men during your whole career. . . . You have made your life largely a sacrifice in working for the good of others, neglecting your chances for achieving financial success for yourself. . . . I am sure you will die at your gun, and your riches, when that day comes, will consist in the affection and gratitude of thousands of people whom you have helped, and in these riches is the greatest wealth that man can have."⁵⁵

In quite another way Leonard Brown possessed riches which even his former schoolmate at the Des Moines Academy and lifelong friend, James S. Clarkson, failed to note. They lay in his family life — in his wife, Nancy Jane Houston Brown, and in their ten children. From the birth of his oldest child, William Harvey, in 1862, he sought to set high ideals before his children. He once wrote, "None can teach my sons righteousness like myself. I will depend on none others to do so."⁵⁶ In this respect he succeeded admirably,

⁵⁵ "A Clarkson Tribute" in *The Register and Leader* (Des Moines), September 8, 1908.

⁵⁶ Brown's *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be*, Preface, p. 7.

but the credit for this success was shared by his brave, tactful, and hard-working wife, Nancy Brown. Life could not have been easy for her. Bearing and rearing ten offspring, adjusting a narrow financial income to their needs, and tempering the optimistic dreams of the father who was not "a good provider" of the world's goods to the cold reality of food and clothing must have taxed her strength and ingenuity. For years she acted as a buffer between the vagaries of her husband's enthusiasms and the needs of four sons and six daughters. It is, however, to the joint credit of both father and mother that nine of the ten children either attended college or normal school and that several graduated from the University of Kansas and one from Princeton.

When Leonard Brown first met Nancy Jane Houston she was a young, and for her time, a well-educated schoolmistress in East Des Moines. For a year and a half Leonard Brown tempestuously courted her through arguments, oral and written, through love letters and love lyrics.⁵⁷ Interspersed through these letters are many quoted lines and sometimes entire poems which he had written. Failing to hear from Nancy, he inserted in one of his letters,

A little *word*, the gift I crave —
 I crave it not; but 'tis my heart —
 A word from thee — why must the grave
 Be no less silent than thou art.⁵⁸

He assured Nannie that he loved her with as pure an affection as Dante bestowed on his Beatrice, as Petrarch gave to his Laura, or as Burns gave to his Mary. In imitation of Petrarch he dedicated a series of nine sonnets to "Nannie",⁵⁹ which, however, he did not publish until 1879.

⁵⁷ See "Reminiscences" attached to the 1879 edition of *Poems of the Prairies*, pp. 3-45.

⁵⁸ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", p. 18.

⁵⁹ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), p. 66.

In these lyrics, either for the sake of rhythm or perhaps for modesty's sake, he often chose to use Nancy's middle name of Jane. It is doubtful whether any other of his verses reached the artistic and emotional level of these poems, which he called "Pastorals of the Prairies". One, written a year before their marriage, warrants reprinting here:

Do you remember, Jane, the little wren
 That built her nest so near your door last Spring?
 Her pretty mate, — you've listened to him sing, —
 From morn till eve he'd sing; nor cease, but when
 The rain came down in torrents; and if then
 A moment, 'twas to shake his dripping wing:
 Raising his beak toward Heaven his notes now ring
 Clearer than ever, — thinks of love again!
 Thus stays he by his spouse through sun and shower,
 And sings to her in tender, loving strains,
 Gladdening her heart through every passing hour.
 Jane, I'll continue 'mongst the truest swains;
 Just like that bird I'll sing by thy sweet bower;
 Forsake thee not, as long as my life remains!

Leonard Brown was deeply attached to his wife and children.⁶⁰ Although he was out of joint with the times, saw little good in the economic set-up of his time, and though he ruled his children with a strong hand, he found much to praise in the goodness of their hearts, their dispositions, and their success in school work and he constantly acknowledged his gratitude to his wife. Debts and mortgages dogged the life of the Browns. In 1871 the family moved to an eight-acre farm near Polk City which lay fourteen miles from the center of Des Moines. The children attended rural schools but Leonard and Nancy supplemented this limited instruction by encouraging home reading. Nancy Brown, hungry for serious articles and books, encouraged her sons

⁶⁰ Brown's *Poems of the Prairies* (1879 edition), "Reminiscences", pp. 3-65, *passim*; fragment of autobiography, *passim*.

and daughters to read to her as she churned butter or mended socks. In winter evenings the whole family entered into amateur dramatics, staging the Dickens stories of *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*. Occasionally neighboring children were invited to take part or to supply an audience.⁶¹

When they were growing up, the Brown children were more or less oblivious of the fact that they were poor, for many of their neighbors were also struggling with debts and forced to live with only the bare necessities of life. One daughter, Mrs. James Melville Graham of Audubon, recalls a few instances when the pride of the Brown girls really suffered. To reach the country schoolhouse it was necessary to wade through snow. Nancy Brown made leggings for her daughters out of old and much mended woolen stockings. The six Brown girls dutifully pulled on their home-made leggings each morning but before reaching the schoolhouse they surreptitiously pulled them off and stuffed them in a hollow log. Home discipline demanded that the girls return with their shabby leg coverings, so the hated articles were retrieved at four o'clock and dutifully worn home. Mrs. Graham also recalls an occasion when her father took several children into Des Moines for shoes. He presented the girls with boys' shoes because they would wear longer, and worn they were, but apparently not without some grumbling. Even Nancy Brown once expressed disapproval when her husband arrived with a bolt of cloth from which dresses were to be made for the feminine contingent of the family.

In the nineties the family moved to Des Moines. Later the oldest son, William Harvey, located in Lawrence, Kansas, and the Browns moved there so the younger children could attend the University of Kansas. Antoinette attended the

⁶¹ Personal letter from Mrs. L. E. Jensen.

University of Kansas but did not graduate; Abigail and Kate attended Iowa State College at Ames; Margaret studied art at Drake and did some noteworthy work in sculpturing under Lorado Taft at the Chicago Art Institute; Claude was graduated from the University of Kansas; Mabel completed the work in the Normal Department of Chicago Art Institute and was a supervisor of art in the elementary schools of California. Arthur, a graduate of Princeton, spent many years in South Africa as a mining engineer. Charles became a real estate broker. Most distinguished of all, perhaps, was the oldest son, William Harvey. Graduating from the University of Kansas in 1887, he joined the zoölogical staff of the Smithsonian Institute. In 1889 he was sent to the Belgian Congo where he spent four years in scientific research and ten years later he published *On The South African Frontier*, a valuable history of Rhodesia.⁶² This is a truly remarkable record for a family of ten children reared in Iowa under the most humble of circumstances.⁶³

Leonard Brown died in Chicago on August 24, 1914, at the age of seventy-seven years. His body was taken back to his boyhood home in Syracuse, Indiana, where it lies in the family burial plot with his mother and the six brothers and sisters who died in infancy.⁶⁴ His wife lived until December 17, 1921.

What can be said for Leonard Brown? He and his wife

⁶² Material furnished by Mrs. Mabel Brown Colerick; *Encyclopedia Britannica* (14th edition).

⁶³ The children surviving in 1948 were Mrs. Margaret Hacker, Hollywood, California; Mrs. Kate Graham, Audubon, Iowa; Claude D. Brown, Pico, California; Charles Brown and Mrs. Mabel Colerick, both of Altadena, California. Antoinette died in 1905, William Harvey and Lida, 1913, Abigail in 1941, and Arthur in 1942.

⁶⁴ "Life and Death of Leonard Brown" in *The Register and Leader* (Des Moines), September 2, 1914; personal letter from Katherine Graham Heideman (Mrs. Bert Heideman), a granddaughter of Leonard Brown.

reared a large family of superior American citizens. He fought actively for temperance, for better liquor laws, for better education, and for the rights of the common laboring man. He dreamed dreams, some very futile and some not devoid of genius. He was sincere in his belief and he antagonized many who disagreed with him. He could write of the "cannibalism of speculation", of the octopus of labor; he could attack vicious novels, degrading saloons, and racial segregation, and he would gladly have seen socialistic control of the railroads, of the banks, yet he could preach that the solutions of the nation's problems lay in grasping the basic principles of the New Testament. Perhaps his greatest contribution lay in what Matthew Arnold called the function of criticism, that is, the setting into motion, by a few thinkers, of ideas which in time gain momentum and take possession of the populace. Few people would care to see the radical socialism which he preached put into practice in America; yet the last seventy years have brought reforms — reforms such as anti-trust laws and labor legislation. Leonard Brown is now an almost forgotten voice crying in the wilderness, yet the unrest to which his pen and voice gave expression ultimately produced better living conditions for laboring men and for farmers.

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