

Leicester, October 31, 1859.

Dear friend Webb;

I do not actually know the fact, but have no doubt that your Son Richard sailed from N. York last week; he wrote to Mr. Garrison, declaring his intention to do so, and (I think) saying that his passage was secured by one of the line of N. Yk. and Glasgow Ships. He will probably be with you before this reaches you. Tell him I depend on the fulfilment of his promise to write me, after he gets home. One expression in his note led some of us to think he was going in a sailing-ship - as he spoke of desiring a "fair wind" - but this is desirable even for a steamer, and I have little doubt that it was by a steamer that he went. We all send our love and best wishes to him.

We hear quite regularly from my son Edward - who has been tarrying some time at Singapore, but is now, we suppose, at Hong Kong. Business in all the E. India ports has been and still remains very dull, and I begin to fear that E. will be foiled in his purpose of establishing himself out there. This I regret only because of its discouraging effect on him - it seems bad, I mean unfortunate, that a young man's first undertaking, on a considerable scale, should fail. We shall all most heartily rejoice to have him at home again.

I am not surprised at the hearty way in which you speak of S. P. May. I knew he was sure to be a favorite with you, & that he would commend himself to all who should see him. I feel very thankful that he was able to do so much A. S. work in G. Britain & Ireland, as he did; and hope he is not the worse in health for it; but your brief note of the 17th ult^o. occasions us some apprehensions on that point. But we shall soon be able (as I hope) to judge for ourselves; for we may reasonably expect him to arrive within 3 or 4 days, - as we suppose he sailed for Boston on the 21^o inst. Who wrote the letter about him, in the Advocate? I could not think of any one as likely to do it, but yourself, Mr. Webb, or Mr. Palmer. It is not your style at all; so I refer it to one of the ladies. - Ha

I seem to me better qualified, in some respects, to represent our Cause in England than any other person I know. But, on the whole, there is one I should much prefer, above him & all others - viz^t. W. L. Garrison himself.

I am sorry to tell you that G's health is very poor again. He says he has not been well since last February, when he attended a series of pretty laborious meetings in Eastern New York. His physician says he must absolutely refrain from all public speaking, and our Executive Committee, one week ago, passed a formal vote - unanimously - advising and urging him to cease for a time all Antislavery work and editorial occupation, & take a voyage for his health, remaining abroad awhile, & seeking to recruit his health by rest & diversion of mind. But he resists all advice & entreaty - "the undertaking is too great," - He is always very sick on the sea, - and I doubt not the voyages, from & to home, are perfectly mountainous in his sight. Even if he could, as he now is, he could do no A.S. work - ought not to attempt to do any. But I shall continue to hope that his health will improve, and that he may be prevailed on to visit England again, and spend a long season of Antislavery work there.

The papers doubtless will have told you into what consternation ^{our} the Slaveholding States here, & especially Virginia, have been recently thrown by a very daring & extraordinary attempt, by a mere handful of men, to seize the United States Armory & Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, on the border adjoining Maryland, with the avowed (and, doubtless, actual) purpose of setting free the Slaves, first in that vicinity, & afterwards in a wider

territory. Nothing has happened, for a long time, to excite the whole country, indeed, so much. On the night of Saturday, Oct. 15th, a small, armed band of men, 22 in number only, quietly marched into Harper's Ferry, and without a show of resistance, possessed themselves of the Arsenal, & all the Government workshops there. Setting a guard in that place, they proceeded to visit several neighboring farms, & summoned the slaves to join them, who did so, some willingly, the most (it is said) reluctantly, - took the masters prisoners, together with several prominent citizens of Harper's Ferry, & marched them all to the Arsenal. They also obtained complete possession of the whole town, a place of over 1000 inhabitants!, and no attempt at ^{organized} resistance was made there. They stopped the R. R. trains (they afterwards confessed that this was a mistake), cut the telegraph wires, & endeavored to prevent the news from immediately spreading. But in vain. On Monday some companies of Virginia militia, from the neighboring districts, marched into the place. They accomplished little or nothing, save to shoot at some stragglers, a portion of whom were unarmed, but endeavoring to escape. Soon after, troops arrived from Baltimore, and a large body of United States Marines from the Navy Yard at Washington. The ^{officers of the} latter ~~made~~ held a parley with the force in the Arsenal, the ^{officers} who offered to leave if they could do so with their arms & prisoners, and have a few minutes clear time, when

they would release their prisoners in safety, and the troops then might pursue. But these terms we refused, and a violent attack made on the arsenal. Heavy gates were burst in, and after a brief fight a little party within were overcome, & killed or taken prisoners. One Marine only was shot.

The leader of this daring and desperate attempt was an old man, pretty well known here of late years, John Brown of Kansas. He was for many years a resident of the State of New York, where he reared a very large family. They were all earnest Anti-slavery men; and when the Kansas question arose, & a large ^{tribal} emigration of men from the Free & Slave States, rushed thither, to determine the question whether it should be a Free State, or a Slave State, old Brown & his sons were among the first to go thither. They settled on good ~~farms~~ land, but were very soon set upon by the "Border Ruffians" of Missouri, who visited them, stole from them, and at last killed one of Brown's sons, a young man. From that time, Brown's whole soul seemed to be on ~~his~~ done what he could against slavery. He organized a company, for protection against the 'Ruffians', and he so made his very name a terror to those brutal men, who fled in alarm when they heard of his approach. In one of his expeditions, he drove out a band of these men from the town of Osawatimie, routing them completely, and has since been known by the name of 'Osawatimie Brown'. Little has been heard of him lately, until this Harper's Ferry affair. In the contest there, two more sons of his were killed, and he himself badly wounded. The trial of the three or four prisoners is now going on. The Virginians are completely panic-stricken, and are hurrying the trial in a most unheard-of way, and will doubtless hurry the prisoner to the speediest execution which the forms of law there allow, and they allow anything the slaveholders want, as against their Slaves, and all who would set them free. Their policy - as even the most pro-slavery journals of the North, such as the New York Journal & Commerce

are telling them - is ² to treat these men ~~with~~
with ~~some~~ moderation, at least to spare their lives, and
to inflict no greater punishment than imprisonment;
but they are too much excited & alarmed & imperious for
this, & will doubtless have nothing short of their lives. Brown
has behaved with the utmost self-possession and dignity
through the whole trial, and the unanimous testimony of all
who have seen him from the beginning of the affair is that
he has proved himself a man of great capacity, of cool
judgment, & of indomitable spirit. Towards his prisoners, he
was courteous & respectful. To all he proclaimed his purpose
to be that of liberating the slaves; and he should touch no life
or property, save what he deemed absolutely necessary to
secure that end. His great mistake was in supposing
that the Slaves of that section were bold enough to fight for
liberty, and ready to fly to arms against their masters;
besides, the news of his seizure of the arsenal could not possibly
circulate among them rapidly, and they could not be sure,
when they heard of it, ~~that whether~~ ^{that} the men were their friends.
Had the Slaves risen in considerable numbers, and joined
Brown as he evidently expected, none can foresee what
would have been the issue of the contest - possibly a general
service war would have ensued. For Brown had it not
only in his power to distribute among them all the arms &
ammunition of the U.S. armory at that place, but had
collected in the neighborhood a large quantity of weapons, &
among them, it is said, 1500 pikes or spears, for arming the
slaves not skilled in the use of fire-arms. It would
seem that he had long been planning this attack. It was
surely a very daring one, for ^{in many respects} the ~~most~~ part planned &
executed with great judgment, & its secrecy well-kept;
but it utterly failed, on account of defects obvious enough
now, but which he seems to have been deceived about, or
to have deceived himself. His plans appear even to
have looked to seizing the reins of the United States
Government, expelling Buchanan and his pro-slavery
Cabinet, and setting up an Anti-slavery Government! - Alas,
for his delusion! His object was a noble one; for if ever a
resort to physical force and bloody means can be justified, it
surely is so in the case of the Slaves of this country, & their friends.

Slavery is itself a continual state of War, Violent
Bloodshed, and Cruelty insupportable, and is itself a rea-
son and a justification of any amount or kind of resistance
to it, according as one believes in one kind of resistance
another.

What the effect of this daring, but unsuccessful, effort
against the Slave Power will be, it is too soon to say. Some
Republicans ^{who are} alarmed for their political success in the coming Pre-
sidential contest, predict all manner of evil. The Democratic
Party ^{who are} now nothing but appendages to the Slave Power, are
ready for the most servile work, so they get ^{the} offices & other
is in high spirits at the affair, believing they can make
the means of saving their Party, ~~before~~ which they had
before quite despaired of. My own opinion is that if
the Republicans are such fools as to flinch before the
Slaveholders in this matter, - apologize, and disavow
sympathy, & join in the execration of Brown, - they will
make themselves despised, & throw away their own
victory. Their duty is to throw every Proslavery taunt
and menace back into the ranks from which they can
and plainly tell the Slaveholder that it is he, and
only, who is responsible for the attempt at Harper's
Ferry, - that it is his cruelty, fraud, & crime which
are bringing on him this retribution, - that he is only
reaping, as he daily sows, and that the harvest is be-
gun to be gathered in; that, if he persists in his
oppression, a terrible destruction must come upon him.
For, as Thomas Jefferson himself said, Virginian and
Slaveholder as he was, "I tremble for my country when I
remember that God is just, and that His justice cannot
sleep for ever; for one hour of ~~that~~ the slave's bondage
fraught with more misery than ages of the oppression when
our fathers rose in rebellion to throw off; and, in the contest
which must come, God has no attribute which can take
sides with the Slaveholder." Let the just issue be made "

(dating it Boston).

If you like to print the above sketch, you are very welcome.
Excuse its defects, & amend as you please. - Kindest regards to all yours,
Samuel May