

The Colored American Magazine

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REMINISCENCES OF THE LIFE OF HARRIET BEECHER STOWE AND HER FAMILY.

G. GRANT WILLIAMS.

No family is more highly or justly honored by the American people of a past generation, especially Afro-Americans, than the Beecher family, which has so effectually assisted in enriching the intellectual field of achievement in this New World by its contribution of able writers, public speakers, eloquent preachers and noted philanthropists.

Everybody now is anti-slavery. It is honorable now to be a child of the man who "cast the first anti-slavery vote in our town"; or "called our first anti-slavery meeting"; or first entertained Garrison as guest, or Abbey Kelley, or Frederick Douglass; or rescued Stephen Foster or Lucy Stone from the hands of a ferocious mob; or raised, or commanded the first company of colored troops in the war of Rebellion, at the time when not a musical band could be found in the whole city of New York to play for a colored regiment, as it marched from the New Haven railway station to the steamer at the foot of Canal street to embark for the seat of war! says Parker Pillsbury. But Garrison, Birney, Dr. Bailey, Lovejoy, Henry Ward Beecher and their associates found the world loving the trespasses and sins of intemperance, slavery, war, capital punishment and woman's enslavement, and refusing to part with them, especially slavery which had enriched even Rhode Island; it was the sin and crime of the whole nation. It was sustained by the government, it was sanctified by the religion of the nation, even the Quakers gravely considered the question, not whether it was right to hold slaves, but whether it was right to brand them with red-hot branding irons.

Today the old battle of the abolition-

ists must be fought over again on the question of disfranchisement; happily, we hope, without the horrors of war if only the American people will be persuaded to be just toward a weaker race; but if not, then, indeed, we may tremble for this country when we reflect that God is just.

Under the baleful influence of slavery, Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," was born in Litchfield, Conn., June 14, 1811. Her father, Lyman Beecher, was a Congregational minister of remarkable ability, both as an orator and a thinker.

Harriet attended the village school with her brother, Henry Ward Beecher—afterwards world-famous as a preacher and a lecturer—who was two years younger than herself. When twelve years of age she wrote a composition of such merit that it was selected to be read with two others at the annual exhibition—the subject: "Can the immortality of the soul be proved by the light of nature?"—and her father, being one of the judges, after listening with deep interest, turned to the master and asked, "Who wrote that?" "Your daughter, sir," was the reply, and she was so overjoyed that in later years she declared that it was the proudest moment of her life.

It was from her father also that in these young days she learned the true nature of slavery and the slave trade. This is her own story as written to a friend in 1851: "I was a child in 1820, when the Missouri Compromise was agitated, and one of the strongest and deepest impressions on my mind was that made by my father's sermons and prayers, and the anguish of his soul for the poor slave at

that time. I remember his preaching drawing tears down the hardest faces of the old farmers in his congregation. I well remember his prayers morning and evening in the family, for poor, oppressed, bleeding Africa, that the time of her deliverance might come; prayers offered with strong crying and tears, and which indelibly impressed my heart and made me what I am from my very soul, the enemy of all slavery."

Story books were rare in those days, but in a barrel in the garret, the young girl found pages of "Don Quixote," a copy of "The Arabian Nights," and finally her father, himself fascinated by the genius of Sir Walter Scott, allowed her to read Scott's novels, and she and her brother George went through "Ivanhoe" seven times, and could recite many of its scenes from beginning to end, verbatim.

When thirteen, she was sent to Miss Catherine Beecher's seminary at Hartford, Conn., and soon became a teacher. She remained in Hartford till 1832, when her father went to Cincinnati as President of Lane Theological Seminary, taking his family with him. On January 6, 1836, she was married to Prof. Calvin E. Stowe, who was sent to Europe immediately after as a commissioner appointed by the State of Ohio to investigate the public school systems of Europe. During his absence Mrs. Stowe lived with her father and wrote for "The Western Monthly Magazine" and "The New York Evangelist." She also assisted her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, on "The Journal," a small daily paper, of which he was temporary editor.

The anti-slavery movement in Cincinnati began at this time. James G. Birney, of Huntersville, Alabama, at one time a slave-holder, judge in the courts, and a ruling elder in the Presbyterian church, emancipated his slaves, provided for their future support, and took them over into the free State of Ohio, by the advice of Theodore D. Weld. Thus wash-

ing his own hands of the guilt of slaveholding, Judge Birney set himself to the work of abolishing the foul system. He came to Cincinnati, and in connection with Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, founded an anti-slavery paper called "The Philanthropist." He suffered every possible indignity and outrage at the hands of infuriated mobs, and the vengeance of church and state. In the darkness of midnight the mob entered and carried press, types and all other paraphernalia of the office and sunk them in the Ohio river.

In 1836, Mrs. Stowe's domestic life began with the birth of her twin daughters, and in 1838 her son Henry was born. For fourteen years life was a struggle with ill health and poverty, until in 1850 Mr. Stowe became a Professor in Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Me., and in 1852 "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was published, and brought her \$10,000 at once, and a yearly income which made her comfortable for life. A few years after the Birney incident, Dr. Bailey published an anti-slavery paper at Washington. He was a man of remarkable ability as an editor, greatly respected by his brother journalists, and it was in this paper that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was first published as a serial.

It was during her life in Ohio that Mrs. Stowe became familiar with the cruelties of slavery, through the fugitives of Kentucky who were continually crossing the Ohio river and being helped on their way by the "Underground Railroad," the house and barn of the Beechers being one of the first stations. Talking with these fugitives nearly broke her heart, and thus it was she was able, in after years, to draw tears of sympathy from thousands all over the world, arousing that irresistible force of public opinion which put an end to the whole system and caused President Lincoln to greet her, upon the occasion of their first meeting, at Washington, D. C., "So this is the little woman who brought on the war."

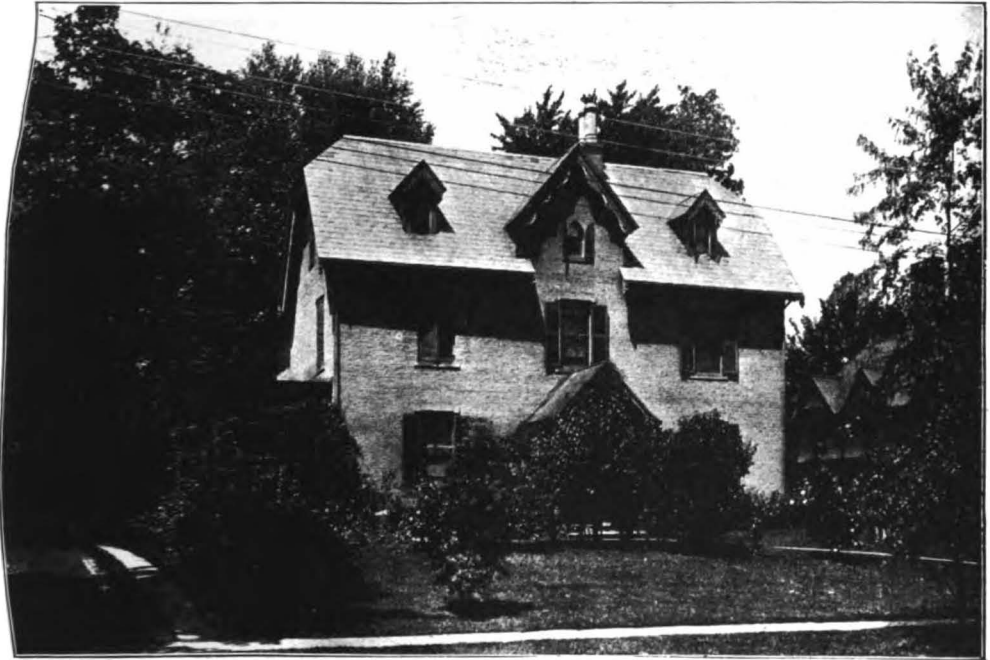
In 1853 the family removed to Andover, Mass., and Mrs. Stowe visited England with her husband and her brother Charles, and was royally entertained by some of the most distinguished families because of her "wonderful book"; twice again she traveled in Europe, writing "Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands," and "Agnes of Sorrento." While abroad she rendered Miss Elizabeth Greenfield—

severe trials, of great courage and executive ability, hating the sin but tender toward the sinner, she was the personification of gentle womanhood. What greater tribute can we give her?

"It lies around us like a cloud,
A world we do not see;
Yet the sweet closing of an eye
May bring us there to be."

—From a poem by Mrs. Stowe.

Isabella Beecher is the youngest of the



THE HARRIET BEECHER STOWE RESIDENCE, HARTFORD, CONN.

"The Black Swan"—signal service in getting concerts and patronage from the influential nobles of London.

In 1863, by reason of Mr. Stowe's failing health, the family moved to Hartford, the home of Mrs. Stowe's early days, where she resided until her death, July 1, 1896. She lies buried in the village churchyard at Andover, beside her husband and her son Henry.

Mrs. Stowe was a woman of great genius who lived as seeing the invisible inhabitants beyond the Veil. Patient under

four daughters of the New England divine, Dr. Lyman Beecher, and was born in Litchfield, Conn., in 1822, ten years later than her illustrious sister, Mrs. Stowe. Isabella was the first child by a second wife, and with her brother James made up the group of eleven who have since, individually and collectively, become the most remarkable family in America. Mrs. Hooper is now eighty years of age, and says that she hopes to live many years longer; she is the only one of the Beecher family living.

At nineteen years of age she married Mr. John Hooker, a talented young lawyer. Mr. and Mrs. Hooker lived in Farmington until 1851, when they removed to Hartford, Conn., which has since been their home, the house and grounds upon Forest street, near Mrs. Stowe's residence and that of Charles Dudley Warner and

people, who recognized in their host and hostess a charm of manner and grace of conversation beyond what is often permitted even the most cultured to enjoy. There was no gossip, but incessant discussion, keen but kindly controversy, and the flashing to and fro of wit and humor.



HENRY WARD BEECHER.

"Mark Twain," being a handsome and hospitable place. This home consisted of a home farm of a little over one hundred acres, just outside the limits of Hartford, and was called "Nook Farm."

A writer in the "Hartford Post" wrote an article on the life of Nook Farm:

In the social and intellectual life of this city, Mr. Hooker has borne no small part. Aided by his gifted wife, his home early became the centre of a group of cultured

What evenings one remembers in the society of such men and women! If Hartford has ever before or since, had a brighter, sunnier, healthier, more hospitable or quickening spot than Nook Farm in those far-off days, it has been fortunate indeed. Great clouds were gathering in the political sky, but the inmates of that home regarded them with a faith and hope and courage that were

contagious. Great excitement and tumults were abroad, but there was the peace of a certain glorious confidence in God and humanity.

John Hooker was a careful and intelligent student of the social, political and religious questions of his time, and like

pursued the work. The history of her struggles will doubtless be written. It will be a memorial of unflagging labor, cheerful sacrifice and social martyrdom. Isabella Beecher Hooker and a handful of other brave women have been pioneers in the cause, and to them the women of this generation owe much of their intel-



HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

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the wife of Johnathan Edwards, who kept pace with her husband in his theological researches and speculations, Isabella Beecher learned from her husband much of his profession, and studied the basis and evolution of the laws which govern the United States. In this way Mrs. Hooker became distinguished as a powerful advocate of woman's suffrage; for more than thirty years he has faithfully

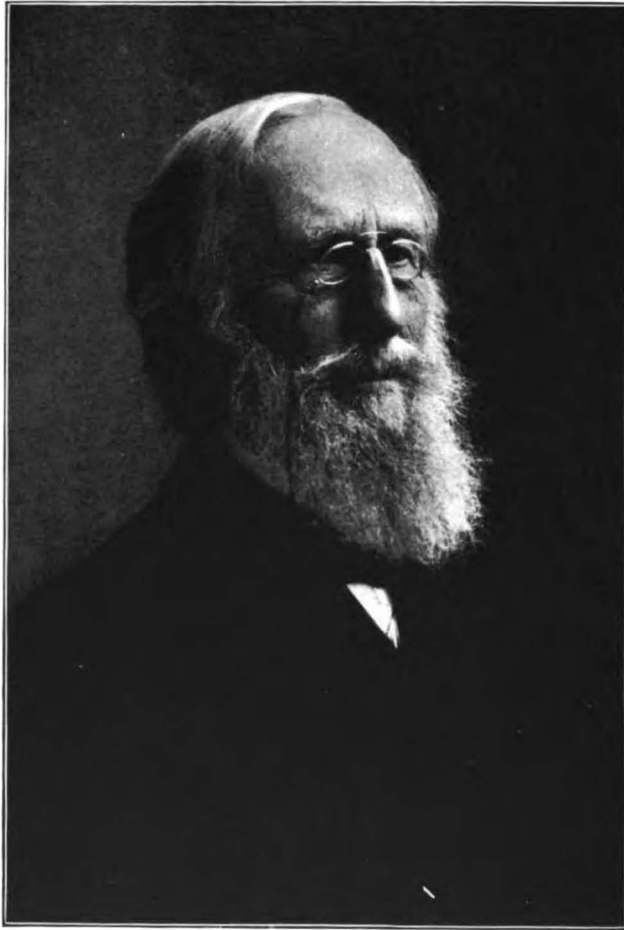
lectual status, professional privileges, and the literary and artistic possibilities which now invite the young woman to enter.

Mrs. Hooker has no grievance other than the sufferings of unfortunate humanity. Singularly happy in her father, brothers, husband and son, she has no tirade against men.

In 1891 occurred the golden wedding of Hon. John Hooker and his wife, Isa-

bella Beecher Hooker. It was such a golden wedding as is not often seen, and seldom, indeed, falls to the happy fortune of husband and wife to celebrate. Thousands of guests were present afternoon and evening—a mixed and curiously representative gathering. A queer and

broad Shakespearian shirt collar lay wide over his shoulders. This quaint vocalist gratified the large company by singing some of the family's old and popular songs; among them, we have no doubt, he rendered some stirring numbers used in their abolition concerts.



HON. JOHN HOOKER.

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quaint-looking figure in the crowd was John Hutchinson, a survivor of the Hutchinson family of New Hampshire, vocalists, who with Judson, John, Asa, Abby and Jesse, and all the rest, used to give popular concerts, along in 1845, and later. His long hair, almost white now, fell down over his shoulders, parted behind in two divisions, and an immensely

Mr. and Mrs. Hooker may well feel gratified at such a demonstration of the interest and respect felt for them by the people of Hartford." [The *Hartford Times* of August 6, 1891.]

Mrs. Hooker has placed herself on record on the question of disfranchisement: "We are told by men themselves that there are too many voters already; re-

striction is what we want, not enlargement of the suffrage. If disfranchisement meant the annihilation of the trouble I might be glad to get rid of this troublesome question in that way; the task of running this country would then

they need it, and the more we need they should have it. And let me say in passing, that reconstruction in the South is hindered today for the same reason; responsibility is taken away from a large class of citizens. A disfranchised class



MRS. ISABELLA BEECHER HOOKER.

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be fare easier than it is; but it does not mean annihilation. Do not disfranchise these men,—enlighten them, for God has sent them here for a purpose of His own. And I say to you tonight, that the ballot in the hands of every man is the only thing that saves us from anarchy today, that keeps us alive as a republic,—the ballot in the hands of these ignorant men, and *the more ignorant they are the more*

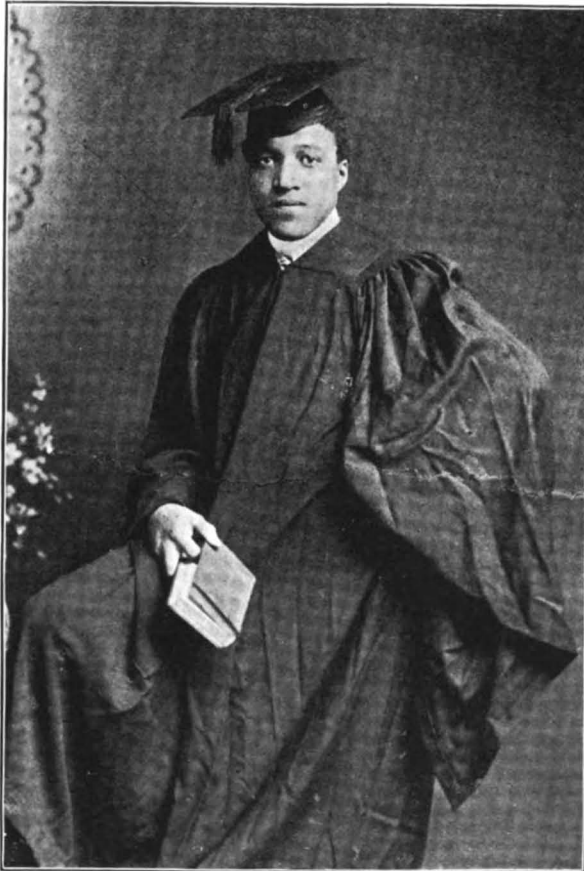
is always a restless class; a class that, if it be not as a whole given up to violence, will at least wink at them, when committed by men either in or out of its own ranks. *What the South needs today is ballots, not bullets.*

“We have got all Europe, and all Asia is coming; and who sends them? When God put into that good ship *Mayflower* those two great ribs of oak, *personal lib-*

erty and *personal responsibility*, he knew the precious freight she was to bear, and all the hopes bound up in her, and He pledged Himself by both the great eternities, the past and the future, that the ship should weather all storms and come safe

Mrs. Hooker is a true picture of a noble and distinguished American woman working for a grand principle and the upbuilding of her sex.

Hon. John Hooker was born in Farm-



THE LATE JAMES WARREN PAYTON.

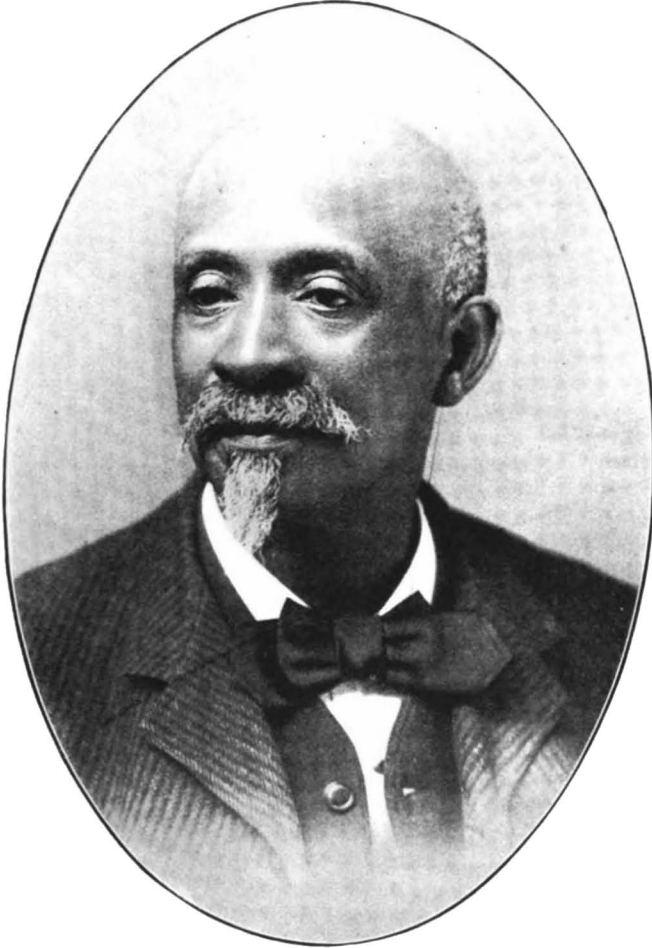
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to port with all she had on board. And what God has promised He will perform. So I beg you not to think for a moment of limiting manhood suffrage. You cut your own throats the day you do it." —[Mrs. Hooker before the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives, Washington, Jan., 1871.]

ington, Conn., April 19, 1816. His father was Edward Hooker, his mother Miss Eliza Daggett of New Haven, who was first cousin of the mother of Roger S. Baldwin, Governor of Connecticut, of William S. Evarts, and of Senator and Judge Hoar of Massachusetts, who thus became Mr. Hooker's second cousin.

Mr. Hooker was admitted to the Bar in 1841, and married Isabella, the youngest daughter of Rev. Lyman Beecher, in the same year. They had four children, two of whom are living. Before this time he had not taken much interest in

slavery element, and before long he found that it would seriously injure his business chances, but feeling that he could not be a traitor to God and man, he saw no way but to keep on as he had begun, and Mr. Hooker testifies to his own ultimate pros-



ELIJAH WILLIAM SMITH.

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the anti-slavery movement, though he had attended the meetings of the abolitionists. He then looked thoroughly into the question and became convinced that it was his duty to join them. Of course, on starting as a lawyer in Farmington, he encountered much unfriendliness from the pro-

perity in these words: "It very likely made it slower work for me to get into business, but in the end made no serious difference; indeed, I think I stood better for it in all my later life."

It was while living in Farmington that the case of "Armistad" occurred, and Mr.

Hooker was cognizant of the facts. Of this case he says in his book:

"A Cuban steamer, the 'Armistad,' was transporting some forty freshly arrived slaves from Havana, Cuba, where they had been purchased by two Spanish

enue cutters at the east end of Long Island Sound, and were taken into New London. Here the Negroes at once found friends and protection, and, after being detained in prison several months, and finally declared free by the courts they



DR. THOMAS W. BURTON.]

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planters named Ruiz and Montez, to their plantations on another part of the coast, when the slaves rose up and overpowered the men, killed the captain, and took possession of the vessel. They knew nothing of navigation or geography, but did the best they could to work the vessel in a northerly direction. After about two weeks they were found by one of our rev-

were brought to Farmington, where they became an object of great interest to the people for many miles about.

"The Hon. John Quincy Adams had, at the solicitation of the committee of citizens, consented to act as their senior counsel, and the cause was finally argued by him and Mr. Baldwin before the Supreme Court of the United States at

Washington, February and March, 1841, and a part of a letter addressed to one of the committee gives the result:

“WASHINGTON, March 9, 1841.

“To Lewis Tappan, Esq., New York:

“The captives are free! They are to be discharged from the custody of the marshal, free. “Not unto us—not unto

seemed to take much interest in the strange things they say, and were very grateful for the kindness shown them. They came from Mendi, in Africa, where a mission was afterwards established, and most of the Negroes returned there. There were 38 youths and men, three girls and one boy. At last, a passage



JAMES A. WILSON, CALHOUN, ALA.

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us,” etc. But thanks in the name of humanity and justice to you.

“J. Q. ADAMS.’

“Comfortable quarters were provided for them at Farmington, with a large schoolroom, where they were taught the rudiments of knowledge and something of our language. Some of them were very bright and learned quite rapidly, and all were well-behaved and orderly, and

having been secured for them in a vessel bound for Sierra Leone, a farewell public meeting was held in Broadway Tabernacle, New York, Nov. 27, 1841, when after devotional exercises, instructions were given to the missionaries under appointment, the Rev. Wm. Raymond and wife, and the Rev. Jas. Steele, who were to accompany the freed Africans back to their home.”—[“Some Reminiscences of a Long Life.”]

Mr. Hooker tells in his book, with much pride, that he was once a slaveholder for twenty-four hours. It happened in this wise: Rev. Jas. W. Pennington, a full-blooded Negro, was the pastor of a Congregational church for colored people. No one knew he was a fugitive slave. Upon the passage of the "Fugitive Slave Law," in 1850, Rev. Pennington became alarmed and divulged his secret to Mr. Hooker. His name as a slave was "Jim Pembroke"; he ran away when eighteen and was then about forty.

It was finally decided that Rev. Pennington's safety lay in flight, and he went to Scotland. Friends in Scotland finally took the matter in hand and raised a sum of money to buy the Doctor's freedom. Mr. Hooker thereupon wrote to Mr.

Tilghman, "Jim's" former master, asking the lowest price he would take for his freedom. Mr. Tilghman was dead and his administrator demanded \$150. He added that, as administrator, he had no power to manumit, but could only sell the slave; the purchaser could manumit. Mr. Jos. R. Hawley, since a senator at Washington, went to Maryland and took a bill of sale of Rev. Pennington for Mr. Hooker. On securing the bill Mr. Hooker held it for a day to see what the sensation would be of owning a doctor of divinity—Heidelberg in Germany having conferred that degree upon the former slave. A deed of manumission was then executed, which may be found today in the town records—a wonder for future generations. Mr. Hooker was a genial man, kind husband, faithful friend and brilliant citizen. *Requiescat in pace.*