

## TOPICS OF THE TIME

### The Hero.<sup>1</sup>

THE monument to Colonel Robert Shaw just erected in Boston is, all things considered, the most accomplished, the greatest work of plastic art yet produced in America. It is fitting that the art of the New World should culminate in this tribute to one who dedicated his pure young life to his country, to freedom, to the uplifting of a people in bondage, to the ennobling of the whole race of man.

The character of this lovely youth, the crisis in which he was involved, the special duty which he undertook with such solemn devotion, all tend to make his figure in our national history as typical as it will be forever memorable. The sculptor, in pouring into his work all the surprise, the ardor, the very spirit of that day in Boston when the black troops marched to the front with their young commander at their head, has made the monument express more than the mere occasion, remarkable and significant as was that occasion. In this sculptured picture we see the awakening of a race, the dark, determined mass moved by a common impulse of daring endeavor; lifted above these, the high-bred form, the delicate, intense, intellectual visage, the fair Anglo-Saxon head of their heroic leader; and high over all, the everlasting ideal, the symbol of the spiritual purpose, which beckons, inspires, and gloriously rewards.

Robert Shaw was not the only youthful sacrifice to the cause of human freedom and nationality; every memory has its bead-roll of youthful martyrs, names like those of young Ellsworth and Winthrop and George de Kay. But his personality, his peculiar service, and the crowning tragedy of his career, even the circumstances of his burial, make the deed and the name of Shaw worthy of, the distinction of so expressive and splendid a monument as that which the world now owes to the genius of St. Gaudens.

As a school-boy Rob Shaw was the very type of the American school-boy of our own day—high-spirited, just, affectionate, frank, and pure of heart. His letters home show every trait of a natural, unaffected, pleasure-loving, manly youth. His parents were his confidants. To them every boyish whim, every prejudice, every hope was confessed. It was indeed a happy childhood and youth, troubled only by occasional anxiety for the health of that honored mother who still lives to see the memory of her boy assured, not only in his own great deeds, but in immortal art.

In the volumes, privately printed, in which his parents brought together with loving reverence the letters of

the boy and the soldier, along with posthumous tributes which were paid to his character and his heroism, we can watch the flowering of this noble spirit in a congenial and fortunate soil, through sunny days, till fate and opportunity brought the compelling duty and the crowning act of heroic patriotism.

He was a type, and yet his individuality was exceptionally winning—in personal beauty, in an indescribable charm of bearing and of spirit. Once, at a fancy ball, and without a mask, he so easily passed for a sweet-faced girl that the astonishment was great when, as he gleefully told the story, he spoke out «in a loud, swaggering voice.» No clearer idea of his sympathetic nature and the gentle rectitude of his character could be given than in the tribute of a classmate who declared: «He could do what few men can, and that is, tell his friends of their faults in such a way as not to give offense, and also make them correct them.»

Reared in an atmosphere of reform and intellectuality, and related to men like Lowell, Curtis, and Barlow, he took the antislavery and reform ideas of the time without morbidness or suspicion of superiority or self-consciousness. At fifteen (in the year 1852) he writes home from Neuchâtel in answer to a suggestion that that one should not be afraid of declaring one's religious opinions. He said he should not be afraid of declaring them «if there could be any kind of use in it»; but he did not wish merely to bring up discussions which would be stupid and tiresome, as he did not want to become «reformer, apostle, or anything of that kind»; he thought there was «no use of doing disagreeable things for nothing.» In the same letter he asks: «Have you seen that book named (Uncle Tom's Cabin)?» Next year he writes: «I've been reading (Uncle Tom's Cabin) again lately, and always like it better than before, and see more things in it»; adding, as if in answer to some inner questioning: «I don't see how one man could do much against slavery.»

But there is no excess of this serious note in the early letters, which abound in the joy and curiosity of healthy boyhood. Two days before he is seventeen he writes to his mother: «You mention my becoming a merchant; but that's entirely out of the question. I had rather be a chimney-sweep. They at least can have fresh air, and not get peaked and lean, like a fellow sitting all day on a five-foot stool in a nasty hole of a counting-room.» Then, as if in apology: «They are all holes here. I don't remember the American ones.» And then the genuine voice of youth: «All I can say for the present is that I have no taste for anything except amusing myself!» And yet when the time came he was will-

<sup>1</sup> Robert Gould Shaw, son of Francis George and Sarah Blake (Sturgis) Shaw, was born at Boston, October 10, 1837, and killed at Fort Wagner, July 18, 1863. His family moved to New York when he was a child, and have lived on Staten Island or in the city ever since. His

brothers-in-law were George William Curtis, Robert B. Minturn, Gen. Francis C. Barlow, and Charles Russell Lowell. He married Miss Annie Haggerty on May 2, 1863. His widow, for many years an invalid, divides each year between Paris and Switzerland.



ing to give the counting-room a fair trial; and again, when the time came, he was as ready for the grim amusement of war.

If it were possible here, it would be a pleasure to trace the development of Shaw's career through school life, European study and travel, and his Harvard course; it would be delightful to tell of his love of music and of literature, his comradeship with some of the most attractive and noble of the young men and women of those days just before and during the war for the Union; to watch from year to year the growth of that stern and exquisite nature. But there is time now for only a few of the leading incidents of the moving narrative.

Young Shaw took up military study and discipline with deliberate purpose. He entered the famous Seventh Regiment, New York State Militia, because, as he said to his mother, Lincoln's election might bring trouble, and he wished to be prepared to do his part for the Union. When the trouble actually came, the only thing he regretted in their sudden call to the front was that his mother was away at the time. He could not keep from tears when he remembered that she would come home to find his room empty.

It is gratifying to know that the boy whose name will be linked with that of Lincoln in the cause of human freedom saw the great liberator more than once. While the Seventh was quartered in Washington he called with young King, the son of Columbia's president, on Secretary Seward, who gave them a note to President Lincoln. The President was «sitting at a desk perfectly covered with papers of every description.» He got up, and shook hands with them both in the most cordial way, asked them to be seated, and seemed glad to have them come. Shaw thought it «too bad» for any one to call him «one of the ugliest men in the country,» for he had «seldom seen a pleasanter or more kind-hearted looking one,» and he had «certainly a very striking face. It is easy to see,» added the young soldier, «why he is so popular with all who come in contact with him. His voice is very pleasant; . . . he gives you the impression, too, of being a gentleman.»

But the Seventh's short time of service was not long enough for Shaw. Before it expired he took a commission as second lieutenant in the Second Massachusetts Regiment. Either in the regiment or on staff duty, he served faithfully till the summer of 1863, seeing meantime some of his dearest comrades killed or captured at his side. At Winchester, in 1862, a bullet which might have killed him was stopped by his watch. He well earned his promotion to a captaincy.

Early in 1863 Governor Andrew of Massachusetts, having undertaken to place negro troops in the field, concluded to select for their officers «young men of military experience, of firm antislavery principles, ambitious, superior to a vulgar contempt of color, and having faith in the capacity of colored men for military service. Such officers,» he said, «must be necessarily gentlemen of the highest tone and honor.» Reviewing the young men then in the service, and of the character described, the governor determined to offer the colonelcy of the first colored regiment to Captain Shaw.

It is significant as to his character that the greatest responsibility of Shaw's life was one not sought by

him; that he even hesitated at its acceptance; that indeed he at first refused the hazardous honor. His father took him the offer of Governor Andrew on February 3. He declined, and his father returned to New York. On the 6th he telegraphed, accepting. What strivings of the spirit made the history of those days of indecision can only be imagined. His letters show that it was in no momentary enthusiasm that he made his final resolve, but after long pondering and under a conviction of unescapable duty.

In the record of which I have spoken, the story of his remaining days rushes to its climax with the remorselessness of a Greek tragedy. We see him working to fill up the ranks of his regiment, the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts, drilling and firmly disciplining them in their camp at Readville, Massachusetts; then comes his marriage, and a few happy days stolen from the troublous times; then the presentation of colors by Governor Andrew, in an eloquent and memorable speech, to which the young colonel modestly replies; and on May 28 the triumphant march through Boston, one of the most thrilling scenes of the whole war. «Never can I forget,» wrote a friend when all was over, «that sweet smile which he gave when twice . . . I proposed to the surrounding crowd to give (three cheers for Colonel Shaw.) It was full of intelligence and sweetness. It seemed to beam with youthful joyousness, as he sat his horse so finely, and withal bore his ovations so modestly.»

Again at the front, now under General Hunter, on the islands off our Southern coast, he took part in an expedition when a village with nothing but a few women and children in it, and which had made no resistance, was burned to the ground. The command to destroy was from Colonel Montgomery, and it was not till afterward that Shaw learned that the order proceeded originally from a higher officer. To this barbarous deed he was so bitterly opposed that he wrote to the acting adjutant-general of the department that if the colonel took such action on his own responsibility he should hereafter «refuse to have a share in it, and take the consequences.» On July 16 a portion of his command did well in action, which greatly gratified him, partly because it wiped out the remembrance of the Darien affair, which had so wounded his sense of soldierly honor.

Colonel T. W. Higginson, who saw him about this time, records the strong impression he created of «quiet power,» and the «tinge of watchful anxiety in his look.» His attitude toward his men was remembered by others. In camp at Readville «he moved gracefully, kindly, and resolutely among his black troops.» One of his men said, in a published letter, that to a casual observer there was a touch of austerity in his relations with the soldiers of his regiment. No man among them would have dared to presume upon any supposed liberality of his opinions; «but had any man a wrong done him, in Colonel Shaw he always found an impartial judge.»

But now comes a sudden change of base. At James Island he learned that a new attack upon Fort Wagner was contemplated. His close friend, the lieutenant-colonel, asked him, if they charged the fort, whether he would go in front or behind the men. He replied: «I cannot tell now, but I trust that God will give me strength to do my duty.» He was heavy with despondency. His



friend begged him to shake it off. He quietly answered: «I will try.» Nights and days of marching and exposure followed. On the last day Shaw was deeply depressed, and talked despairingly. He asked to be left alone, so he could think of home. In an hour he had conquered, and his cheerful spirits returned. When his general asked him if he wished the privilege of leading the column of attack, his face brightened, and he answered, «Yes.» As the men, tired and hungry, lay flat on the ground before the assault, he was more familiar with them than he had ever been known to be before. He walked along the line, and encouraged them, saying: «Now, men, I want you to prove yourselves *men!*» «His lips were compressed, and now and then there was visible a slight twitching of the corners of the mouth, like one bent on accomplishing or dying.»

It is now nightfall, and at last all is ready. The regiment is formed in two lines, the colonel taking the right wing in front. Coming up to Lieutenant-Colonel Hallowell, he said: «Ned, I shall go in advance of the men with the National flag; you will keep the State flag with you. It will give the men something to rally round. We shall take the fort, or die there.» All his sadness had left him.

Then came the rush upon the fort. His friend saw him again «just for an instant, as he sprang into the ditch; his broken and shattered regiment were following him, eager to share with him the glory of his death.» When within one or two hundred yards of the fort a terrific fire of grape and musketry was poured upon them, tearing the ranks to pieces. They rallied again, went through the ditch, which held three feet of water, up the parapet with the flag, the colonel leading. He waved his sword, cried out, «Forward, Fifty-fourth!» and fell dead, with twenty or thirty of his officers and men killed close about him. The rest is well known. They «buried him with his niggers» in one long trench, and his father refused to have that honorable grave disturbed.

But at last the trench itself has been washed away by the waves of the Atlantic, and in the South may now be found some of those who appreciate and cherish most tenderly the fame of Robert Shaw.

A letter to those who mourned, from one who had herself suffered in like measure, expressed the thought of multitudes when the news of this «costly sacrifice» was flashed through the North: «When the beautiful vision, which was beheld by so many thousands, of the inspired and brave young hero at the head of his dusky followers, is recalled, many who never had an earnest thought about it before will feel, «This must be a sacred cause for which such a youth has offered so willingly his life.»

No death in the cause of liberty and union, save that of Lincoln himself, has been the occasion of such tributes as those which have been offered to the memory of Shaw. This was Lowell's hero when he wrote:

Right in the van  
On the red rampart's slippery swell,  
With heart that beat a charge he fell  
Foeward, as fits a man;  
But the high soul burns on to light men's feet  
Where death for noble ends makes dying sweet.

And he was Emerson's youth who nobly answers to the voice of duty:

So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When Duty whispers low, *Thou must,*  
The youth replies, *I can.*

Already the prophecy of Motley is being fulfilled. «I have often thought,» he said, «how fondly his image will be retained in after-days as a type to inspire American genius. . . . Sculptors, painters, and poets will delight to reproduce that beautiful vision of undying and heroic youth, and eyes not yet created will dwell upon it with affection and pride. And when the history of these dark, tragic, but most honorable days comes to be written, there is nothing . . . that will fasten itself more closely on the popular memory than the storming of Fort Wagner by the Fifty-fourth, with their colonel falling on the rampart, sword in hand, cheering on those despised blacks to deeds of valor.»

The patriots of to-day are not now, and may not be, called upon to die «sword in hand»; but this country is in need of men who will bring into the fight against civic corruption as keen a sense of duty and as true a courage as that which inspired the young hero of Fort Wagner.

#### The Sculptor.

PERHAPS no living artist has so high a reputation as St. Gaudens, and so strong an artistic influence, with so little of his work familiar to the general public. His «Lincoln» in Chicago, and his «Farragut» in New York, are the statues most familiar to the people, and on these his just popular fame is mainly based. But in the art world St. Gaudens has long been known as the author of a series of medallions, of numerous portrait heads, memorial monuments, and pieces of decorative sculpture, all of which have the stamp of mastership. Before a great while his Shaw monument, his splendid and virile equestrian statue of Logan, his statue of Peter Cooper, his Sherman equestrian statue, and other works of a monumental character, will give still wider public proof of a genius the evidences of which have been fully known and appreciated by artists and critics for many years. THE CENTURY from time to time has given examples of his work, but in this number of the magazine a greater array of his sculpture is presented than on any other occasion. And although much is necessarily omitted, it is easy to see that the sculptor's fame already rests on foundations ample and absolutely secure. It is gratifying to know that he is in the fullness of his artistic strength, and that the future should hold for him as many triumphs as the past.

#### The Man in the Copper Box.

INASMUCH as the most serious daily inquiry of three fourths of the millions who struggle on the earth for a bare physical existence is, «How shall we be fed?» the paper beginning on page 246 of this number of THE CENTURY is of very wide significance. In it Professor Atwater offers the first popular explanation of a series of experiments which are conducted under the auspices of the government, and which promise, in their future development, to have an important bearing upon the problem of the economical and healthful feeding of humanity. Expressed in more scientific terms, the purpose of the investigation is to study the laws of nutrition: to find out more than is now known of the ways in which food