

**BROOKS MEMORIAL.
COMMUNICATIONS ON
THE DEATH OF CHARLES T.
BROOKS, OF NEWPORT, R.I.**

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Brooks Memorial. Communications on the Death of Charles T. Brooks, of Newport, R.I. by
Various

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MEMORIAL
OF
CHARLES T. BROOKS.

BIRTH AND BOYHOOD,
BY E. B. WILLSON.

NEVER was there a full river beautiful between its banks, and made serviceable to men by the carriage to and fro of themselves and their goods, that they did not at length go searching for its source and explore its course. In the same way it happens that when a man, living forty-six years by the sea at Newport, R. I., becomes as preacher, scholar, poet, writer, man of rare and memorable qualities, beautiful and strong, an object of admiring regard to many, inquirers come at length to our Salem streets asking the elders: where did this life begin, and how?

Up about the region where the stream starts and is small, and the observers are few, it attracts but little notice: it may even be in dispute which are the chief tributaries. Not much in themselves, except to a few farmers whose lands they beautify and irrigate, it is only when they acquire importance as the headwaters of the deep and broad flowing stream below, that they are traced and mapped with painstaking attention.

It not being known yet, or even clearly knowable, that the Salem boy is the beginning of the Newport man that is to be, his childhood and boyhood pass here without special notice in their unfolding and events, except as now and then one, teacher or fellow-student it may be, having occasion or opportunity for closer observation than the rest, sees a promise, not of just that which will come later, but of *something* not of the commonplace to be waited for and expected, if this life shall reach an autumn ripening.

It was at the summer solstice, when the days were long-est and the nights at their minimum, that a child of light was born to Timothy and Mary King (Mason) Brooks: June 20, 1813.

It was Sunday, moreover, and the sound of the church bells and of the carol of birds was in the air. If nature had a day in her calendar for that year, select and celestial, it should have been this; a day for a poet to be born; for even a "babe of paradise" not to feel astray or lonesome looking its first upon this warm, fair, leafy and flowering earth.

The house now numbered seventy-seven in Bridge street, northern corner of Arabella street, was the birth-place of Charles Timothy Brooks.

For fifteen years he remained under his father's roof, from the summer of 1813 to that of 1828, though the family home was not long in the Bridge street house. Among the earliest things we learn of him, outside the home, is that he was a pupil in the private school taught by his maternal aunt, Miss Abigail Mason, with whom in after years he long maintained a bright correspondence, she being then engaged in teaching in Virginia and looking to him for news from the New England home and friends.

A little picture of him inserts itself here, since it must belong to about this time of his infant-school days. Though

drawn in three or four touches, it brings him vividly before us. It has its setting in the reminiscences of a friend perhaps a little older than himself, the Rev. S. P. Hill of Washington, D. C., who found in the death of Mr. Brooks, in June last, the occasion for relating this incident.

"My recollections of him commence at a very early age. The first time I ever saw him was when he was a mere child and I could have been but a little older, yet he made an impression upon me that I have never lost. His ruddy, baby, cheerful face, his evidently bright precocity struck me forcibly. It was on a serene evening, we happened to pass each other on Derby's wharf, he having hold of his father's hand, and passing at the time an anchor thrown upon the wharf;—his father asked him to spell it, which he did very readily and correctly. This, for his early age, seemed to me the proof of advanced elementary learning, and pledge of future scholarship."

In a letter written in 1839, to a brother just arrived home from a voyage, and who had inquired after his family, Mr. Brooks gives us perhaps a still earlier glimpse of himself in which we catch a manifest likeness to the bonny child to whom we were introduced on Derby wharf. "I have a fine little fellow of a sonny. I think he will learn as early as his father did. You know I used to come down in my night-gown and say the multiplication table and read the newspaper to the folks when I was four years old. I don't say it to boast, because I think I've made a slim progress considering my early promise."

This descent from the bedroom in night apparel brings to mind another incident related of his small boyhood which, though not bearing immediately upon his early taste for letters, shows other traits, not so remote as might at first appear from those which gave him success in the lit-

erary labors of his manhood : persistency, method, thorough attention to the last details. He had wet his feet during the day, playing and attending school, and coming in at evening, his mother, after taking off his shoes and changing his stockings, hung the wet stockings to dry by the kitchen fire in the basement. At bedtime they were not quite dry and he was reluctant to go up to his chamber in the third story without them ; but on his mother promising to take them to his room when she should go up stairs for the night, he consented to leave them behind. In the middle of the night, when the household was buried in sleep and silence, Charles awoke, put his hand out of bed to ascertain if the stockings were in their accustomed place, and finding that they were not, rose at once, proceeded to the lowest story, down three flights of stairs, brought up the stockings, and having deposited them just where they belonged returned to bed and to sleep.

It was probably after his attendance at Miss Mason's school, though it may have been before, that he went for a time to a public school taught by Miss Mercy Ropes, afterwards, by marriage, Mrs. Joseph Webb, this school occupying a site at about the present 94 Essex St., a little to the west of the Phillips School ground ; possibly with an entrance from Bath street, as well as from Essex street.

The next school which Charles Brooks attended is believed to have been a private school kept by Hervey Brown, on what was then Bath street, has since been Forrester street, and is now Washington Square, nearly on the site of the present Phillips school, possibly a little to the east.

In 1824, at the age of eleven years, he entered the Latin Grammar school of which Theodore Ames was the principal and Henry K. Oliver the usher.

In this school he completed his preparation for college,

entering at Harvard in 1828. One of his classmates in the Latin School, soon after they joined the school and were coming to know and measure each other, is said to have carried home the report, which he delivered with due emphasis, that they had a boy at their school who had a head.

This appears to have been the unanimous voice among his school-fellows, and endorsed by his teachers. At the same time it is finely apparent that these honors were borne so modestly, if not unconsciously, as to awaken no envious feeling in any; on the contrary, the youthful leader seems to have been a favorite with all, and to have drawn to himself only admiration and confidence.

"One of the most pleasing memories of my schooldays" writes one of his class, in the *Christian Register* "is that of a group of boys of the lower forms of the Latin School (myself among them) clustered round the desk of Charlie Brooks before the opening of the school, asking of him a solution of our difficulties in translating and scanning Latin verse, in which we were then novices. I well remember his bright and cheery look, the rosy spots in his cheeks, and the ready, willing way in which he solved our difficulties, some of which were the result of obtuseness, and others of laziness. But it made no difference to him: he helped us all the same, with no sign of impatience.

"We regarded him as the particular bright scholar of his class. He was the only one whose aid was thus sought, and I think of no other by whom it would have been so cheerfully given.

"I doubt if the trait so lovingly named by Mr. Wendte as a prominent virtue of his life, 'self-denial,' living for others rather than himself, was ever more beautifully shown than in his willingness as a schoolboy to help others who were less advanced than himself, under importunities that at times must have tried his patience and good-nature."

To the same effect runs the testimony of his teacher and friend, the veteran schoolmaster, Henry K. Oliver, still wearing his laurels green among us at the age of eighty-three years.

"My love for him was a love at first sight," says Gen. Oliver, "when about the year 1824 he entered the school, a lad of some dozen years of age. I most distinctly remember his slight figure, his calm and attractive face, and his quiet and gentle way and manner. The boy was father to the man, and we became— what is too infrequent between teacher and scholar— intimate friends, our friendship enduring through life.

"He was literally a faultless boy, winning the love and affection of masters and associates without effort, by the mere unaffected action of his inborn nature and disposition. Never was even mildest reproof, by either word, or look, or hint, called out by him, and yet he was active, lively, and of constant, unvarying good humor, playful with his mates in playtime, and earnest and studious in study-time. So native to him was it to be and to do right, that he was right and did right unconsciously, without effort, at all times and under all circumstances, his innate ingenuousness banishing all affectation."

It is easy to see why Charles Brooks should be esteemed by his teachers the ideal schoolboy; they had only to teach him; a task which ceased to be a task, as his eager pursuit of knowledge stimulated their minds, and rewarded with quick apprehension their labors of instruction.

At the end of his first year in the Latin School, he took the first prize awarded to a member of the fourth class, which was a copy of Valerius Maximus presented with appropriate complimentary speech by the Hon. John Pickering, the Chairman of the School Committee.

An incident deserves mention here which shows how

great was his eagerness in learning; it is not certain to what age of the boy it should be referred, nor what school he was attending at the time. It was probably before the Latin School period. In running over some shingles which had been torn off a roof and lay on the ground, he stepped on one of the rusty nails, point up, and ran it into his foot. It was a pretty serious wound. He limped home and had it treated there with proper attention. This was between the morning and afternoon school-sessions. His attendance at school in the afternoon seemed out of the question, and such was the parental decision. But the boy could not see it in that light at all. And so urgent was his remonstrance, and so persuasive his insistence that he *must* go to school, and *could n't* stay at home, that his father finally yielded, got a chaise and took him to school.

It must not be supposed that Charles Brooks was an absent-minded, plodding bookworm, at this period, or indeed at any period of his life. His enjoyment up to the end of his life of games, and of children's company, and his hearty sympathy, and often ingenious assistance in their amusements, and his constant play of humor, his overflow of witty rhyme, his keen appreciation of bright and racy repartee in conversation, saved him easily from the suspicion of having skipped his proper childhood sportiveness in its season, or of having sacrificed the frolicsomeness of youth to his fondness for books.

No doubt his tastes led him to prefer for the most part the finer sports of intellectual play to the more boisterous and physical feats in which the athletic take delight. His organization was sensitive and fine. But it was not an unhealthful *over-fineness*, or reserve from out-door activity. His love of nature was strong. He liked the open air best. A walk between Cambridge and Salem, after he went to College and the Divinity school, was no rare event.