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THE BEACON BIOGRAPHIES



EDITED BY

M. A. DEWOLFE HOWE



JOHN BROWN

BY

JOSEPH EDGAR CHAMBERLIN





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JOHN BROWN

BY

JOSEPH EDGAR CHAMBERLIN



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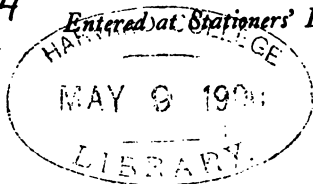
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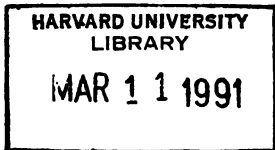
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The photogravure used as a frontispiece to this volume is from a photograph of a daguerreotype which is supposed to have been taken in Kansas in 1856, and which is now in the possession of Mrs. Charles Fairchild. The present engraving is by John Andrew & Son, Boston.

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To

MRS. GEORGE L. STEARNS



PREFACE.

To present a picture of the man, separating him as much as possible from the controversies and hatreds which commonly rise up at the mention of his name, and to tell the story of his life plainly, without inquiry into the effect of his work, or any further estimate and comparison, would be quite enough to attempt in a biography of John Brown of Osawatomie as brief as this one must be. Brown's sacrifice has been classed sometimes with that of Jesus of Nazareth; he has often been called murderer, brigand, and traitor. He has been written about much and well, and for the most part fiercely. It would seem that the time has come for a calmer account of him, given with no heat or bitterness. Both sides of the controversy with which he concerned himself so actively should have learned much in forty years.

Yet the story of Brown is so strongly simple, so utterly governed by an ideal, so

glowing and tragical, that any one who follows it closely is likely to find himself kindling before he is aware of it.

JOSEPH EDGAR CHAMBERLIN.

Boston, October 15, 1899.

CHRONOLOGY.

1800

May 9. John Brown was born at Torrington, Connecticut.

1805

His family removed to Ohio.

1816

Joined the Congregational church at Hudson, Ohio.

1821

June 21. Married Dianthe Lusk.

1825

Appointed postmaster at Randolph, Pennsylvania.

1832

August 10. His first wife died.

1833

July 11. Married Mary Anne Day.

1835

Returned to Ohio.

1837

Swore his family to active opposition to slavery.

1840

Made a trip to western Virginia to survey lands for Oberlin College.

1846

Removed to Springfield, Massachusetts, as selling agent of the Western wool-growers.

1847

Unfolded to Frederick Douglass a plan for a negro insurrection in the Virginia mountains.


1849

Went to England to sell wool, and visited the Continent.

Became associated with Gerrit Smith's plan to colonize negroes on Adirondack lands, and removed his family to a farm at North Elba, on these lands.

1850

Thanksgiving Day. Addressed a meeting of negroes at Springfield, and wrote to his wife concerning it, suggesting a militant intention regarding slavery.



1859

January - March. Conducted a small party of liberated Missouri slaves through the Northwestern States to Canada.

July 3. Appeared at Harper's Ferry. Hired a farm near there. Assembled men and munitions.

October 16. Attacked and captured Harper's Ferry with his band.

October 17. Was attacked by United States forces, wounded, and made prisoner.

October 26. Placed on trial at Charlestown, Va.

November 2. Found guilty.

December 2. John Brown died on the gallows.

JOHN BROWN




JOHN BROWN.

I.

JOHN BROWN was born at Torrington, Connecticut, on the ninth day of May, 1800, in a poor wooden house among the round Appalachian hills which the man loved, in a peculiar way, to the day of his death. His father, a tanner and shoemaker, had lived in that house and township but a year when John Brown was born; but in the country within the little circle made by Windsor, Canton, Norfolk, Litchfield, and Torrington, the father and all the folk had been born and bred, and their fathers before them. It was all a part of the same land of round hills and winding valleys, inhabited by the same hard-working and fiercely thinking people.

Mr. W. E. Forster sums up well enough the story of Brown's ancestry when he says that he "was of the best blood in America." Some careful gene-


alogists have thrown a little doubt upon his descent, as assumed by himself and by everybody else who has written about him, from Peter Brown, the carpenter, who came over in the *Mayflower*. I see no good reason to doubt this descent; but it makes little difference whether his blood came down from this man or not. He was at least descended, like nearly all the people in his part of Connecticut, from the remarkable colony who settled Windsor, Connecticut, and who were in every way quite equal to the *Mayflower* group. They were an intensely pious and devoted band, carefully chosen, man by man and woman by woman, "especially that their efforts might bring the Indians to the knowledge of the gospel." Apostles every one of them, on their way over in the ship *Mary and John* they "had preaching and expounding the word of God every day for ten weeks together." They went on foot through the pathless



forest from Dorchester, Massachusetts, to Windsor. They were five weeks on the way, and winter closed in on them before their stuff and provisions could come up the Connecticut by boats; and then they starved and shivered and prayed and preached. Their sufferings are a part of the story of John Brown. These early apostles and martyrs were compressed into him.

His grandfather was Captain John Brown of the Revolutionary army, who died in the service in 1775. This grandfather's wife, Hannah Owen, was of Welsh descent. Our John Brown's father was Owen Brown, born in Canton, Connecticut, in 1771. His mother was Ruth Mills, of Dutch descent; but these mothers, as well as the fathers, were bred in the Yankee hills, and their blood was well mixed with that of the Puritan Yankees. John Brown, even with his dash of Dutch and Welsh blood, was a Yankee of the Yankees.

Brown's mother, Ruth Mills, was a godly, sane woman, without a story. His father, Owen Brown, emigrated in 1805 to Ohio, and there became a trustee of Oberlin College. Hudson, the place where he settled, in the Western Reserve, was then in the midst of a wild country. There young John Brown went to school to herdsmen and Indians, learning of the herdsmen such mastery of their trade that he drove great herds of cattle long distances alone at an early age, and of the Indians the arts of shooting and riding and dressing skins. He did not learn here to hate the Indians, as other frontiersmen did, but learned instead to love them ; and years afterward on the frontiers of Kansas they paid back his love with kind services. In his little Autobiography, sent in 1857 to young Harry Stearns of Medford, and written throughout in the third person, there is a note which shows that sensibility was born in him : "When John was in his



Sixth year, a poor Indian boy gave him a Yellow Marble, the first he had ever seen. This he thought a great deal of, and kept it a good while ; but at last he lost it beyond recovery. It took years to heal the wound, and I think he cried at times about it."

He had a rough time in this "University of the West," as Thoreau called his early life. He was dressed in buckskin and furs, and spent long days in the woods, with only cattle or sheep for his companions. He tells us that he was for a time "quite skeptical," but the Bible triumphed over all the other books that he was able to read ; and he tells, too, of having the "free use of a good library." He "joined the church" (Orthodox Congregational) at Hudson, Ohio, in 1816, and never wavered in his Puritan belief. He was, he tells us, "naturally fond of females" as a boy, yet "diffident in their company." We have evidence that in his mature life

women were always strongly drawn to him, but in no sentimental way. His life was unmarked by the faintest suggestion of an irregular attachment.

He had next to no schooling. He went at the age of about sixteen to his birthplace in Connecticut, and it was then proposed to educate him for the ministry. He attended for a time the school of the Rev. Moses Hallock at Plainfield, Massachusetts, a school famous for turning out preachers and missionaries, and studied also at the Morris Academy in Connecticut. But his training here was soon cut short by inflammation of the eyes, and he went back to Ohio and the tannery. With this schooling, and, no doubt, with much reading of old books and the Bible, he picked up an admirable epistolary style, clean cut and expressive, often eloquent, showing thought about words and fine discrimination in the use of them. His spelling was somewhat er-

matic, but, barring a too free use of capitals and peculiar punctuation, he could have written a sermon or leading article that would pass muster exceedingly well at the present day. He learned the tanner's and currier's trades, and was foreman in his father's tannery. He picked up, too, the surveyor's art, and became proficient in this, so that his surveys have stood the test of later scrutiny. But the real love of his heart was for the calling of the shepherd. Early in his life, he says, he had an "enthusiastic longing" for it; and in his later life he returned to it as often as he could. His casual memoranda indicated that he thought more about sheep than he did about anything else. Joined with this love was the kindred passion, which never left him, for fine cattle and horses.

John Brown's mother died when he was eight years old. His father soon remarried, but John always mourned his

own mother. He matured early, and as a young man was described as of remarkably fine and noble appearance. As his father had done before him, he married young, at the age of twenty; and he is said to have had previously one disappointment in love. His wife, Dianthe Lusk, lived to the age of thirty, having, in eleven years, borne him seven children. She is said to have died in a demented state; and one or two of the children of this marriage apparently inherited from her a certain occasional mental weakness. Even in the early years of this marriage Brown followed Puritan and patriarchal ways,—conducting family worship, ruling his children firmly, instructing them at his knee, and singing hymns to them.


In 1825 Brown was made postmaster at Randolph, Pennsylvania, by President Jackson. He also established a tannery at that place, which he conducted evidently with some success. It was there

that his first wife died, in 1832; and there that, a year afterward, he married Mary Anne Day, the faithful, devoted, wise and patient wife who survived him twenty-five years. She bore him thirteen children, seven of whom died very young.

The large surviving family of children of these two marriages, as well as other persons who knew him, have left abundant memories of his life and character. These represent him as headstrong, but humane and kind, possessing great tenderness and grave sweetness of manner, and exceedingly fond of his family. Though his children testify to his use of the rod on a few occasions, they affirm that he never applied it unjustly. He was fond of music and singing. Sanborn says that he "sang a good part," and tells of seeing him weeping at a performance of Schubert's "Serenade." He taught a singing-school for a time at North Elba. He is said to

have been "rather dull in speech," though when he was much interested he spoke fluently enough, in a resonant and somewhat metallic voice. He distrusted utterly his powers as a public speaker, though late in life he made several very creditable addresses, and could engage in religious exhortation.


John Brown was a trifle less than six feet tall. He dressed neatly and plainly, in a somewhat rustic and sober rendering of the fashion of the time. The best description of his personal appearance is Bronson Alcott's, made when Brown was fifty-nine years old: "Nature obviously was deeply intent in the making of him. He is of imposing appearance, personally, — tall, with square shoulders and standing; eyes of deep gray, and couchant, as if ready to spring at the least rustling, dauntless yet kindly; his hair shooting backward from low down on his forehead; nose trenchant and Romanesque; set lips, his voice suppressed, yet metal-



lic, suggesting deep reserves; decided mouth; the countenance and frame charged with power throughout. . . . I think him about the manliest man I have ever seen,— the type and synonym of the Just.” Others described his eyes as “blue-gray,” and Dana found him “dark-complexioned.” Brown never wore the beard in which all the world now sees his face until his fifty-eighth year, when it helped him to a needed disguise in Kansas. One or two of his unbearded daguerreotypes make of him a grimmer, less intellectual Emerson. In the frontispiece of this book he is shown in the height of his wild period in Kansas, when fighting, exposure, and fever had rendered him somewhat haggard; but the picture brings us nearer to the soul of the man, it seems to me, than any other does.

Brown early began to shift about and show the wandering characteristics which afterward became so marked in him. In

1835 he went back to Ohio, took up the tanning business there, bought wool, raised fancy live-stock, including race-horses, speculated very indiscreetly in land, indorsed a note for a friend, failed disastrously, and in his bankruptcy attempted, in pursuance of a lawyer's advice, to hold a farm against which there was an attachment, and was arrested on a peace warrant and taken to Akron jail ; but the key does not appear actually to have been turned on him. He had pledged for his own benefit some twenty-eight hundred dollars put in his hands by the New England Woollen Company for the purchase of wool ; but this he made no secret of, and was not troubled on account of it by the company, which still trusted him. He was all the rest of his life—and more, for he left fifty dollars for the purpose in his will—in paying up this debt. His friends and business men in general went on trusting him with large amounts of



money, which, in two or three cases, he found it hard to repay. In 1840 he went to Virginia—the portion of it on the Ohio River, now in West Virginia—to survey some lands belonging to Oberlin College, and fell completely in love with the country. From there he wrote to his family, “I have seen the spot where, if it be the will of Providence, I hope one day to live with my family.” These Virginia hills exercised upon Brown a fascination which made it easier, no doubt, for him to associate with them his subsequent revolutionary schemes.

In 1844 he formed, with a substantial wool-grower and dealer, Simon Perkins, of Akron, Ohio, a partnership which continued for some years. Long after Brown’s death, Perkins summed up his business qualifications thus: “He had little judgment, always followed his own will, and lost much money. I had no controversy with John Brown, for it

would have done no good." Brown bought much wool, and had the care of the flocks of the firm. Perkins admits that he was an expert in grading wools. Indeed, as an instant and accurate classifier of fleeces, he seems to have won an almost national reputation in the trade.

In 1846 he was sent to live at Springfield, Massachusetts, as the agent of sheep farmers of northern Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Virginia. He graded and sold their wool for them direct to the manufacturers of New England. He lived at Springfield, with certain absences, some five years, carrying on a considerable business, which he finally brought to disaster by refusing what seemed to him too small a price offered for a large consignment of wool from the Ohio growers, and taking the wool to England in order to get a larger. There he obtained, instead of a better figure, only half the price which had

been offered him in New England. This bankrupted him again, and really ended his commercial career. The very same wool which he carried to England was bought to be shipped back to America, and was so shipped. It was one of the most picturesque failures of a bold stroke of business on record.

After this Brown removed with his family to North Elba, in the Adirondack mountains of northern New York, where he was interested in an experiment which Gerrit Smith, the rich abolitionist and philanthropist, was making in the settling of negroes on wild land.

North Elba continued to be the home of Brown's family until after his death, though he himself lived there very little. The wanderings of his apostolate, following his mercantile travels, had now begun. Thenceforth he farmed and shepherded here and there to supply his own and his family's immediate needs. There are indications, in his


abounding correspondence, that he had sometimes dreamed, in the years before 1850, of making a fortune in business; but after that it is clear that he had quite another end in view.



II.

WHAT made John Brown an abolitionist, and when and why did his abolitionism take its strenuous, militant, and peculiar form? The psychology of his apostleship is a strange and interesting study. He was never in the current of the anti-slavery movement. Though we shall see that he regarded himself, and that his family regarded him, as devoted in a special way to negro emancipation, there is no documentary evidence, no proof from the man's own letters or written memoranda or acts, that the movement "took hold of him" at all actively before his fiftieth year. That he was deeply sympathetic with the enslaved blacks all his life is perfectly incontestable, and that he felt himself especially devoted to the cause of their liberation as far back as 1837 we know on the testimony of his wife and children.

For that matter he was born an abolitionist. His father had been one before him. The motive-spring of John Brown's abolitionism was touched in the year 1790, when the Rev. Samuel Hopkins, of Rhode Island, a man whose opposition to negro slavery was practical and well known, and who was one of the earliest of the abolitionists, visited the Rev. Jeremiah Hallock at Canton, Connecticut. Young Owen Brown (John Brown's father), then nineteen years old, lived with Hallock, probably as a sort of privileged helper, and heard Hopkins talk against negro slavery, "denouncing it as a great sin." Hopkins was a man of native power. He made a life convert of young Owen Brown, who afterward taught his own children abolitionism at his knee. There had been a chance for the development in the boy John Brown of the bent which gave rise to the touching incident so vividly related in his own autobiograph-



ical letter to young Harry Stearns, already referred to, written in 1857: "During the war with England [1812-1815] a circumstance occurred that in the end made him a most determined abolitionist, and led him to declare, or swear, eternal war with slavery. He was staying for a short time with a very gentlemanly landlord, since a United States marshal, who held a slave boy near his own age,—very active, intelligent and good feeling,—and to whom John was under obligations for numerous little acts of kindness. The master made a great pet of John,—brought him to table with his first company and friends, called their attention to every little smart thing he said or did, and to the fact of his being more than a hundred miles from home with a company of cattle alone; while the negro boy (who was fully, if not more than his equal) was badly clothed, poorly fed and lodged in cold weather, and beaten

before his eyes with iron shovels or anything that came first to hand. This brought John to reflect on the wretched, hopeless condition of fatherless and motherless slave children; for such children have neither fathers nor mothers to protect and provide for them. He sometimes would raise the question, Is God their father?"

John Brown, Jr., born in 1821, says that his own earliest recollection is of his father sheltering runaway slaves. While he was postmaster at Randolph, Pennsylvania, John Brown made his house a refuge for such runaways, and in a letter to his brother Frederick, in 1834, he unfolded a scheme for procuring the adoption in Northern families of "negro boys or youth," who were to be brought up as the children of these families were, and educated with them. "Christian slaveholders were to be prevailed upon, if possible, to release slave boys for this purpose." Failing such means, Brown

said, "We have all agreed to submit to considerable privation to buy one." In this letter he wrote, "If the young blacks of our country could once become enlightened, it would most assuredly operate on slavery like firing powder confined in a rock." All this was very peaceful. Brown was evidently reflecting on Nat Turner's poor insurrection in 1831, and the numerous other attempts up to that time, all of which had failed for the want of adherence on the part of the blacks themselves to the movements stirred up in their behalf. Very evidently, he saw that the time had not yet come to attack slavery by force,—that the negroes themselves must be prepared for it.

After Brown returned to Ohio to live, he was a member of the Congregational church at Franklin. He had a respectable negro man and woman working for him. They sat at his table, and on Sunday he took the pair into his pew.

The preacher and congregation angrily objected to this. Brown left the church on account of it ; and though he was all his life a devout Calvinist, conducting family worship daily and sometimes "exhorting" in public, he never belonged to another church. This certainly shows that at this period there was no want of earnestness in his devotion to the blacks.


In 1837 there occurred the episode which first indicated Brown's intention to attack slavery *vi et armis*. His children have testified that in that year he assembled them one day at family prayer, swore them all to work with him for the emancipation of the slaves, and, kneeling on the floor, invoked the blessing of God on the undertaking. There is no reason to believe that either Brown or his children forgot this compact. He seems never to have reminded his sons of it, nor to have been under the necessity of doing so. His children were not relig-

ious in the way he was religious. They were, for the most part, inclined to free thought ; and their disinclination to make a profession of religion gave him great sorrow. He never, in his letters, ceased to implore them to do so. They did not in the least depend for the seconding of their devotion to him in this anti-slavery work upon the invocation of a kind of religious ceremony. They were quite ready to give up their lives at the inspiration of their own sense of duty and their strong personal loyalty and devotion to their father.

After this solemn pledge, Brown went on with his wool business and his farming, travelled almost incessantly between East and West, and set down in his little memorandum book many recipes for curing diseases of sheep, and some wise saws, but never a word applicable to the cause of the blacks. He sent home scores of letters, many of which have been preserved carefully ; and in them there is

much connected with his business and with the farming and stock-raising operations at home, and much about religion and morality. But until a much later date there is nothing in them about the slaves. He went to Boston in 1838, but is not known to have visited any of the abolitionists, though from his Virginia prison, years afterward, he wrote: "I once set myself to oppose a mob in Boston where she [Lucretia Mott] was. The meeting was, I think, in Marlborough street Church." The Marlborough chapel was burned in May, 1838. His note-book contains seven Boston business addresses, and memoranda of business undertakings. There is no reason to suppose that he ever took or read the *Liberator*, and in all that he ever wrote I discover but a single reference to any one of the great abolitionist leaders of New England.

He had in him, in business matters, a bit of native Yankee craft. A letter



of admonition to his son John when this young man went into the business of buying wool warns him against all the dishonest wiles of the sellers of wool, and coaches him in some of the careful tactics of the buyers.

I have mentioned his trip to Europe in 1849. While he was there, he did some highly unsuccessful wool business, as we have seen, wrote home to his son something about the live-stock, the mutton, the architecture and habits of the English, but had never a word to say about the English friends of the blacks and their work. He made a hasty trip to the Continent, and there, as he afterward told Mr. Sanborn, made some study of military matters, and visited some of Napoleon's battlefields. He "had followed the military career of Napoleon with great interest," — that is evident from all his children's account of his reading, — and he even ventured to criticise Bonaparte in some points. Brown

had acquired, undoubtedly deriving the idea in the first instance from the Bible story of Gideon's sifting of his five-and-twenty thousand men down to three hundred, a view greatly in favor of small and extremely mobile bodies of men. He had made as close study as his opportunities permitted of the art of intrenching such small bodies of men and fortifying their positions. But he certainly never had practical knowledge of any other form of warfare than the guerilla campaigning which he practised in Kansas.



III.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS says that Brown unfolded to him in 1847 a plan for insurrectionary work among the negroes, with headquarters in the Virginia mountains. This is another indication, one of many, that he entertained the insurrectionary purpose. But his plans remained in abeyance. His later and active interest in the anti-slavery cause seems to have flashed up into a sudden flame about the year 1850. From that time forward his letters abound with references to the subject, his memorandum book contains entries associated with his work in that field, and the motive becomes clearly apparent in his acts. Did Brown's discovery of his own unfitness to be a man of business help him to see more clearly his way toward devoting the remainder of his life to the freeing of the blacks? Did he conceive an ambition to be a great liberator, and

acquire world-wide fame as the Moses of a whole people? I suppose that an inquiry whether Brown was ever animated by a personal ambition for power or fame would be entirely fair, especially since, as ambitions go, a purpose to attain power or fame in this way would surely be a worthy one.

For that matter the question would seem to be easily answered. A man who is at once meditative, intense, and fond of reading as Brown was, and yet uneducated in the liberal sense, is made by his books. What books did Brown read? Dana found that he had many in his Adirondack cabin. His daughter has written: "My dear father's favorite books of a historical character were Rollin's Ancient History, Josephus, Plutarch's Lives, 'Napoleon and his Marshals,' and the Life of Oliver Cromwell. Of religious books, Baxter's 'Saint's Rest' (in speaking of which at one time he said he could not see how

any person could read it through carefully without becoming a Christian), the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and Henry 'On Meekness.' But above all others the Bible was his favorite volume, and he had such a perfect knowledge of it that when any one was reading it he would correct the least mistake." The daughter appends a list of his favorite passages in the Bible. Nearly all of them refer to the poor and to "them that are in bonds." He was fond of the Apocrypha, and doubtless had pleasure in the warlike deeds therein reported. His daughter records that one of his favorite hymns was "With songs and honors sounding loud," and another, "Blow ye the trumpet." But there is one point, one item of his Scriptural reading, which affords us a special insight. One of his companions at Harper's Ferry, John E. Cook, who had lived closely with him for a long time, has left the statement that "the Bible story of Gideon had a

great influence on Brown." It is manifest that it had. If we read this fine story in the book of Judges in the light of Brown's long brooding over the Scriptures, and also in the light of his subsequent career and acts, noting as we go his organization of the League of Gileadites among the negroes, we find that we can understand Brown much better than we could without this knowledge. The story fired his intense spirit and prompted his actions again and again. He belonged to the epoch of Gideon rather than to the nineteenth century.

That he aspired to do for the blacks what Gideon did for the children of Israel does not prove that he was actuated by personal ambition. It indicates the stirring of a sentiment in him which was something like personal ambition; yet, if he really had a dream of earthly fame and greatness, he suppressed it, and acted as if he had no such dream. In a

great measure he separated himself from men, and carried on his work alone. In spite of his magnificent moral strength and the fact that all the men who came close to him, after the anti-slavery movement fully fired him, at once recognized his power, he never had above twenty-two men attached to his cause and person! Here was the sifting process of Gideon carried farther than Gideon carried it. The thing which we ordinarily call ambition should, first of all, have sent him on his revolutionary way earlier; and after that it should have put into him at least something of the craft which wins crowds.

In Springfield, Brown either fell in with, or else assembled, a circle of colored men, part of them refugees from slavery, and others presumably the bright Northern mulattoes who were eager to do what they could for the freedom of their brothers in the South, though apparently they could not bring

themselves to anything really revolutionary. One of these men, a refugee from Maryland, named Thomas Thomas, worked for Brown as porter in his wool warehouse. Thomas declares that at the very outset of his employment in the warehouse Brown communicated to him the general features of a scheme to liberate the slaves by force, and asked him to join the enterprise. This was early in 1846. Much doubt has been cast upon the accuracy of Thomas's recollection. But Brown was sometimes unfathomable, and he may have seen something in this negro porter which led him to reveal more of his inner thoughts to him than he had ever revealed to any one else.

I have already mentioned the scheme of Gerrit Smith to give a hundred thousand acres of Adirondack land to negro people who should settle upon and cultivate small farms on the tract. It was a foolish idea; for latitude and alti-

tude made these lands the most arctic spot, of an equal area, within the proper limits of the United States. Neither maize nor wheat will thrive there. The lands are rough and sterile. No place more unfit for the colonization of the soft and unenterprising blacks could have been found. But Smith's scheme instantly attracted Brown's sympathy. Loving these hills so much, they also drew him to them of their own force. The shepherd of other days, homesick for the hills and the soil, saw in Smith's scheme a chance to do good to the negroes, while he himself returned to the life he loved best. He visited Mr. Smith, proposed to take up some of the land for himself and his children, and to guide and superintend the work of the black colony. Smith promptly accepted his services; and in 1848 and 1849, without as yet giving up his business at Springfield, Brown moved his family into a rude cabin in those great North

Woods, at a place called — whether or not as the result of Brown's partiality for Napoleon I do not know — North Elba. Here Brown's wife and youngest children continued to live until 1864. He himself spent most of his time at Springfield or elsewhere, with occasional visits to the North Elba farm. The life there was pioneering of a sort only less stern than that which Brown and his sons entered upon subsequently in Kansas. He found the work of coaching negroes in Northern agriculture quite discouraging, and apparently had to take several of these people into his own cabin. Charles A. Dana, on a visit there, found several negroes at Brown's table, to whom he was introduced in due form: "Mr. Dana, Mr. Jefferson; Mr. Jefferson, Mr. Dana," and so on. There was never any hypocrisy in Brown, in this regard or any other: the negro at his board was the equal of any guest.

All this and more Brown could do for

the negro. But up to this time we do not see him preparing or threatening an armed conflict. And the very first plain reference in his correspondence to the great movement which had for years engrossed many great minds occurs in a letter from Springfield, Massachusetts, to his wife at North Elba, dated Nov. 28, 1850. It is important as marking a turning-point in Brown's life, and it is also so curiously like him in its diction and matter that it is worth quoting :—

“*Dear Wife*,— . . . Since leaving home I have thought that, under all the circumstances of doubt attending the time of our removal, and the possibility that we may not remove at all, I had perhaps encouraged the boys to feed out the potatoes too freely. . . . I want to have them very careful to have no hay or straw wasted, but I would have them use enough straw in bedding the cattle to keep them from lying in the mire. I heard from Ohio a few days since ;

all were then well. It now seems that the Fugitive Slave Law was to be the means of making more abolitionists than all the lectures that we have had for years. It really looks as if God had his hand on this wickedness also. I of course keep encouraging my colored friends to 'trust in God and keep their powder dry.' I did so to-day, at Thanksgiving meeting, publicly. . . . While here, and at almost all places where I stop, I am treated with all kindness and attention ; but it does not make home. I feel lonely and restless, no matter how neat and comfortable my room and bed, nor how richly loaded may be the table ; they have few charms for me, away from home. I can look back to our log cabin at the centre of Richfield, with supper of porridge and Johnny-cake, as a place of far more interest to me than the Massasoit of Springfield."

This leads me to the reflection that

Brown, in the matter of abstemiousness, was somewhat idealized by Emerson and Thoreau, who met him when he was at the stage of his highest exaltation in the anti-slavery work and fresh from the fields and camps of Kansas. All they said of him was true, I have no doubt; yet it was hardly true of his whole life. Brown always lived very plainly; and his house and table at Springfield, at the time when money was most plentiful with him, were extremely simple. Yet he was normally fond of good viands. His household diet, though so simple, consisted largely of meat; and the praise that he sent home of the English mutton, when he was abroad, could only have come from a man who knew good mutton. Though absolutely temperate, he was not a total abstainer, and kept wine in his house for cases of illness. Redpath, who was not careful, says Brown "never drank spirits." Sanborn, who is careful, says he "seldom drank

spirits." He had a way, when traveling on business, of putting up at the best hotels. He seems to have been, in fact, a sane, sound, sensible man in most of these material particulars, and not at all inclined to eccentric notions. The hasty way in which he has been idealized, as if his fame were likely to be increased by representing him as subjecting himself to petty and unnecessary martyrdoms, is amusingly illustrated by the frequent statement that he was so habitually abstemious and unaccustomed to luxuries that he refused to eat butter on his bread. The fact was that he never liked butter and cheese, and could not eat them. Sanborn relates that as a boy, ten years old, he was once sent on an errand to a place where a lady gave him a piece of bread and butter. He dared not tell her that he could not eat butter ; but "as soon as he was out of the house he ran as fast as he could for a long time, and then threw the bread and butter out of sight."

Brown had now (1850) ten children, seven of whom were sons. He had lost, to his deep and evident sorrow, seven children, all of whom had died in infancy or early childhood. Two more were yet to be born. His older sons he had educated simply; the eldest, John Jr., with some care at good schools. His faithful wife taught the little ones at the cabin at North Elba. Brown for a time went out to Ohio and engaged in farming, where he could get more money for his labor than in the Adirondack hills.

But before he left Springfield, in 1851, he wrote a letter of instruction to the "branch of the United States League of Gileadites" there,—a band of his colored fellow-conspirators against slavery,—which proves definitely enough that he had taken up with a thoroughly revolutionary doctrine. Mason's Fugitive Slave Act had been passed, and the hunting down of negro fugitives had begun in Massachusetts. Brown was now

fully aroused. He told these negroes, in a manuscript document still extant, that they were fully justified in resisting any law which tried to send them back into slavery. His pronunciamento is a strange mixture of the principles of the Carbonari and Ravachol and the language of the Hebrew Scriptures. The reference to Mount Gilead and the suggestion for the name of the society are from his own great Bible story of Gideon:—


“Should one of your number be arrested, you must collect together as quickly as possible so as to outnumber your adversaries who are taking an active part against you. Let no able-bodied man appear on the ground un-equipped or with his weapons exposed to view. . . . Your plans must be known only to yourself, and with the understanding that all traitors must die wherever caught and proven to be guilty. ‘Whosoever is fearful or afraid, let

him return and part early from Mount Gilead' (Judges vii. 3: Deuteronomy xx. 8). . . . *Do not delay one moment after you are ready: you will lose all your resolution if you do. Let the first blow be the signal for all to engage, and, when engaged, do not do your work by halves, but make clean work with your enemies. . . .* By going about your business quietly, you will get the job disposed of before the number that an uproar would bring together can collect. . . . You may make a tumult in the court-room where a trial is going on by burning gunpowder freely in paper packages, if you cannot think of any better way to create a momentary alarm, *and might possibly give one or more of your enemies a hoist.'*

Brown seems to have hoped to unite the negroes all over the country, now or afterward, in this revolutionary movement; but he failed. There is no sign that they ever anywhere followed his words of advice. Yet he was not igno-

rant of the weaknesses of the African race. He published about this time, in an abolitionist paper called the *Ram's Horn*, a clever satire on the negro character, entitled "Sambo's Mistakes." The manuscript is still preserved, in Brown's undoubted handwriting. It was evidently intended for an admonition. Or did it merely express a great misgiving with regard to the negro race which had entered Brown's intuitively working mind? It represents Sambo as shallow, vain, "fond of joining societies," bound to spend his money and remain poor, disputatious about things of no moment, tenacious of small points of difference, fond of gewgaws, self-indulgent, obsequious to the whites, and more inclined to fight over religious tenets than for his own liberty.

"Sambo's Mistakes" is said to be Brown's longest literary composition. It is surely a little masterpiece in its way. It has a certain prophetic value,



too: the abolitionists of that day were so sure that the negroes needed only to be made free to be fitted for freedom! At this late day, we who are the children of the ardent abolitionists of that earlier period can only sigh when we read such a glorious pæan as Emerson's address, Aug. 1, 1844, at the first anniversary of the emancipation of the negroes of the British West Indies. He joyfully took it for granted that the blacks of Jamaica and Barbados had already successfully taken up the burden of civilization with perfect industry and perfect quietness, and that "all disqualifications and distinctions of color had ceased"; and, in following the notion of Swedenborg as to the spiritual superiority of the African, he said: "I esteem the occasion of this jubilee to be the proud discovery that the black race can contend with the white; that, in the great anthem which we call history, a piece of many parts

and vast compass, after playing a long time a very low and subdued accompaniment, they perceive the time arrived when they can strike in with effect and take a master's part in the music. The civility of the world has reached that pitch that their more than moral genius is becoming indispensable, and the quality of this race is to be honored for itself."

Alas! is there a keener sorrow than for the children of the men who held this hope, and lived and died upon it, to have to ask themselves, Has the negro question been changed in any essential respect by emancipation and enfranchisement? Have those great things done any good to a people who could not do the good for themselves?

The misgiving expressed by Brown himself in this clever little essay on "Sambo's Mistakes" is, to me, a proof of his clear intuition. The fact that he utterly disregarded the suspicion in his

life and work is a proof that his idealism was perfect. He marched straight on with his simple purpose, arguing no more, but living out his frank acceptance of his own doctrine. Events soon made a veritable scourge, a man of weapons and bloodshed, out of this peaceable shepherd, this thrifty buyer and expert sorter of fleeces.

His sons John, Jason, Owen, Frederick, and Salmon went to Kansas, as settlers in good faith, in 1854 and 1855. Their emigration was hard, painful, full of privations. Jason's boy, four years old, died on the way. They took with them almost no weapons, but as many tools, fruit-trees, and grape-vines as they could carry. There seems to have been in the removal no prompting of their father nor any distinctly warlike intention on their own part. Brown had written to his son John, when the boys were talking of going: "If you or any of my family are disposed to go to

Kansas or Nebraska with a view to help defeat Satan and his legions in that direction, I have not a word to say; but I feel committed to operate in another part of the field." Just what he meant by this last reference can only be guessed. Sanborn believes that he was already thinking of Virginia; and Sanborn knew the man well at that time, and has gone more deeply into his life than any other writer. The sons "located" not far from a place called Osawatomie, and lived first in tents, then in rude huts. Fever and hunger overtook them. They were near the border of Missouri, and at the very seat of the struggle between the Pro-slavery and Free State influences.

The issue there was simply this. Kansas had lately been opened to settlement. Although slavery within the territory had, as was supposed, been forever prohibited by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

established what was known as "Squatter Sovereignty"; that is, it empowered the settlers to determine by majority vote whether the Territory should be slave or free. So the opposing forces in the great controversy, practically the North against the South, set themselves to determine the future of Kansas by settling the Territory with their own people and followers. Northerners and Southerners as they came in — "Free State" the ones, "Pro-slavery" the others — confronted each other with hostility. It was really war from the start.

In this war the Brown brothers soon found themselves involved; and John, Jr., wrote back to his father to procure and send to them arms fit to fight with. They also soon asked him to come and help them. He answered that he might like to go; but his agricultural affairs were in such a state that he could not do so unless he could sell some cattle and get pay for some others

that he had sold. On the contrary, he removed from Ohio back to North Elba. On his way he attended an anti-slavery convention at Syracuse, New York, June 28, 1855. Here, and at this date, his war with force and arms really began; for he raised some money from Gerrit Smith and others with which to arm "his sons and other friends in Kansas." He spent some of the money for rifles, and sent them on.

Brown himself went to Kansas in September, 1855, travelling in a wagon beyond the Mississippi. He wrote picturesque accounts of the journey to his wife and children at North Elba. I note this natural touch in one letter by the way: "We fare very well on crackers, herring, boiled eggs, prairie chicken, tea, and sometimes a little milk. Have three chickens now cooking for our breakfast. We shoot enough of them on the wing as we go along to supply us with fresh meat. Oliver succeeds in bringing them

down quite as well as any of us." This boy Oliver, one of his second wife's children, was then sixteen years old, and no doubt was to the mother as the apple of her eye; and the reference is a pretty one. Oliver was killed fighting at Harper's Ferry four years later. Brown liked this sort of life and travel as well as any Indian or gypsy that ever lived. Farther on in the same letter he said, "*With all the comforts we have along our journey*, I think, could I hope in any other way to answer the end of my being, I would be quite content to be at North Elba." And from now on we shall not miss references to his liberating mission.

IV.

ARRIVED in Kansas in October, 1855, Brown went actively to work at breaking up the soil. All his people had fever and ague. The cold and stormy winter was spent wretchedly in a tent banked about with earth. Brown's wife and little children, for their part, were living at North Elba in a cold house, and suffering much. Brown wrote pityingly to his wife, and said, "May God abundantly reward all your sacrifices for the cause of humanity!" The patient woman was content. About him there were frequent killings of Free State men by the "Border Ruffians," and Brown was soon involved hotly in the Free State men's reprisals. The Emigrant Aid Company of New England were sending settlers into Kansas with the object of outnumbering and outvoting the Pro-slavery settlers. They also sent rifles out to help their settlers

make some headway against the Missourians, who did not come as settlers, but rode across the line into the territory to vote fraudulently, to shoot and rob, and to ride back to the security of their homes in a slave State. Brown bestirred himself promptly against these invaders, and in December, 1855, was made captain of a band organized to resist a Missourians' raid on the Free State town of Lawrence. The raiders were repulsed ignominiously, after killing one settler. Brown described in a letter to his wife the heart-rending scene when the wife of the murdered man, whose body the Free State men had found, was brought in to see him.

In a letter written in February, 1856, Brown showed that he had no respect for the federal authority, which was doing its best to bolster up the slavery cause in Kansas. "We hear," he said, "that Frank Pierce means to crush the men of Kansas. I do not know how

well he may succeed ; but I think he may find his hands full before it is all over." Brown had at times in his life — very few the times were, as must be admitted — expressed some veneration for the Constitution and the flag ; but, when these got in the way of his purpose and his conscience, the President became "Frank Pierce" and nothing more, and the flag had little respect from him. He certainly did his best in Kansas to bring on a clash with the federal arms ; and it is worth noting that in March, 1856, the abolitionist Congressman from Ohio, John R. Giddings, wrote to him urging that such a clash be brought about, and asserting that it "would light up the fires of civil war throughout the North." There is reason to believe that this was what Brown had already desired, believing firmly that nothing would bring about negro emancipation but an armed conflict. There was a conservative party among the Free State men in Kansas ;

and those conservatives soon became aware that they had among them an extremist in Old John Brown — as he began to be called for the sake of distinction, since his son John, who had been elected a member of the Free State legislature, was acquiring prominence, and was inclined to more moderate views than his father.

There were now two legislatures in the Territory, one Free State and the other Pro-slavery, each accusing the other of unlawful usurpation. Bands of armed men representing both sides had gone into camp. Brown himself took to ranging and bushwhacking, and acquired a reputation for cool, brave, and clever exploits. One of the neatest of these was his marching, with one or two of the youngest of his boys, in May, 1856, into the camp of a large body of armed Pro-slavery fighters fresh from the South. He carried a surveyor's tripod and chain. He "sighted a line" through the centre

of their camp, and with his sons began chaining the distance. The pro-slavery band supposed him to be a government surveyor, and, consequently, a Pro-slavery man ; and they did not interfere. Brown counted them, and noted their strength. More than that, he engaged them in conversation, and got out of them the betrayal of a plan for a raid on " Old Brown and his gang " !

There was a good deal of pretence of law, and a good deal of invocation of the " sacred authority of the United States," on the part of the Pro-slavery authorities in Missouri and Kansas at this time, but no real law. The lives of Brown and his sons were threatened by men who were perfectly capable of taking them. A Pro-slavery grand jury " indicted " the Free State Hotel at Lawrence, which the abolitionists had turned into a sort of fortress, and sent a posse, under a United States deputy marshal, to destroy it. On May 22, Brown

and others, with one small company of mounted men, and John Brown, Jr., with another, started to the defence of this building and of Lawrence; but to Brown's great disgust the Lawrence people decided to make no resistance to a United States officer, and the place was ravaged. Brown was further infuriated by the refusal of the people at Osawatomie to make a brave stand against the Missourians. Beyond doubt he reached the conclusion that a blow of desperate violence must be struck to arouse the people and overcome the tendency which he saw on the part of the Free State people to temporize, to waver. He also, doubtless, believed his own life to be in danger.

Getting together a small party of trusted men, John Brown went on the night of May 24 to the shores of Pottawatomie creek, where lived several Proslavery men who had terrorized the neighborhood. He called them one by


one out of their beds, and put five of them to death,—not with his own hands, but with those of men who obeyed his command. This deed was committed near a place called Dutch Henry's Crossing, after one of the men whom Brown killed.

Brown had not the smallest doubt that he was directed by Providence in these "executions," as he called them; though he never sought to evade his personal responsibility for them, and talked of them as being committed in cold blood. The party did not kill all they took, but carried off several as prisoners. There is a Kansas legend, *ben trovato* at least, that, on the morning after the Pottawatomie executions, Brown called his followers and his captives together for divine worship in his camp, and raised to Heaven in fervent invocation hands to which still clung the dried blood of his victims of the night. Sanborn notes in this terrible deed the evident prompting

of the story of Gideon's night exploit in overthrowing the altar of Baal. The killings were certainly committed in true Biblical fashion,—with rude curved swords “made like the Roman short-sword,” which Brown himself had carried to Kansas from Akron, Ohio, where they had belonged to a militia artillery company then disbanded. Brown had previously had the swords fastened on sticks to use as pikes, but for this occasion he had separated them from the sticks and ground them to a good edge. Brown evidently had a sort of Berserker fondness for a good blade, as two or three subsequent incidents in his life proved.

This fearful deed on the Pottawatomie sent a thrill of horror through the whole country. The Free State leaders repudiated and condemned it, but before long admitted that it was putting backbone into their people. Terror was certainly struck into the Pro-slavery ranks. It soon became perfectly well known that

Brown was the author of the deed. The Missourians waited until he and his sons were all absent in the direction of Lawrence, and swooped down on their houses, burning them to the ground. The federal military authorities also bestirred themselves; and John, Jr., and Jason were taken prisoners by them, and kept in chains for some time. The younger John Brown had, from anxiety, from horror at the thought of his father having committed the Pottawatomie murders, joined very likely with a tendency inherited from his mother, become temporarily insane. Meantime John Brown the elder, with nine men, and one Captain Shore, with eighteen, encountered and attacked, on June 2, in a ravine at a place called Black Jack, a considerable force of Pro-slavery men under a Virginian named H. Clay Pate. There was a fierce fight, with Brown in command on the Free State side. Through ma-



nœuvring, some wounds, and evidently some running away, Brown's force was reduced to nine, including himself; and to these nine men Pate and twenty-one well-armed men soon surrendered unconditionally. It was an astonishingly brilliant little victory. All of Pate's men laid down their arms on the ground for these nine Free State men to pick up, and were marched off into captivity after the signing of an agreement with Brown that an exchange of prisoners was to be effected, man for man, until all the Free State men held by the authorities were liberated; and John Brown caused it to be specified that his sons were to be the first men exchanged.

A picturesque story concerning this battle has been told me by Mrs. George L. Stearns, of Medford, widow of the wealthy merchant of Boston who supplied Brown with a great part of the funds which enabled him to do his cam-

painging. In 1859, on the occasion of his very last visit before the Harper's Ferry raid,— when, in fact, he was starting for that final desperate adventure,— Brown was leaving Mr. Stearns's house. He paused near the door, bent down, and drew something from his boot-leg. "I shall very likely never return, Mr. Stearns," he said; "and I wish to give you a little personal memento of myself." He handed out a remarkably fine bowie-knife which he gave to Mr. Stearns, at the same time telling its story; this knife is still in Mrs. Stearns's possession; it is a large, beautiful, and well-balanced blade, broad, yet tapering neatly to a sharp point; it is of English make. It had been bought, Brown said, by a subscription, for Jefferson Buford, and, when that Southern chieftain had been discomfited in Kansas and his band scattered, he had passed it on to the Virginian Clay Pate, with the injunction that it was to be used in taking the

life of Old John Brown. When Brown captured Pate at Black Jack, this knife, hanging at Pate's belt, instantly attracted Brown's eye. "I will thank you for that knife," he said. Pate demurred, and declared that there was a special reason why he did not wish to give it up. Brown demanded to know the reason. "Well, the fact is," Pate said at last, "that knife was given me to put an end to your career with, Captain Brown." Brown took the knife, slung it on his belt, and then said, "Well, it seems that the Almighty had other designs concerning it!" One can imagine Brown's fine repression of any tendency to smile as he made this response. His humor was grim, but it was unquestionably present. He also took a sabre from Pate's lieutenant, and kept it until he found use for it in a deal for pikes in Connecticut.

As Brown rode away with the prisoners taken in this admirable fight, in-

tending to make use of them in procuring the liberation of his sons, he fell in, unluckily, with a body of United States troops under Colonel Sumner, a Massachusetts man, an anti-slavery sympathizer, and afterward a successful commander on the federal side in the Civil War. Brown was too good a soldier to suppose that, with some nine or ten men and with twenty-two prisoners on his hands, he could successfully engage a large force of United States dragoons, even if he had cared to make a direct issue then with the United States authorities. But he came openly and parleyed with Colonel Sumner as if he were his equal, and Sumner seems to have done the same with him. There was a most impressive incident at this meeting. Brown was at that time charged with murder on the Pottawatomie, with treason and conspiracy; and a price had been put on his head. He was several times an outlaw. A civil officer


accompanied Sumner ; and the colonel, who must have estimated the situation cleverly, sympathizing with Brown and yet feeling bound to do his duty, turned to this civil officer, and said, "Have you not some warrants to serve here?" The man looked at Brown, standing there armed to the teeth, tall, with terrible eye. No one in Kansas believed that the old man would allow himself to be taken alive. "I — I see no one that I have a warrant against," the civil officer said. If this were a scene in a play, one can imagine the silence, and then the applause.

So Colonel Sumner, who could hardly do less, or more, compelled Brown to release his prisoners, and ordered him to disband his own party, but did not undertake to disarm one of them. Brown's men "disbanded" — and banded again a mile or two further on, and kept up their guerilla warfare.

Within no very long time Brown's

sons were given their liberty. He and they fought and lived on the prairies and in the gulches, and shook and burned with fever and ague, and sometimes lived for days almost without food, and bushwhacked on.

Mr. W. A. Phillips, who was afterward member of Congress from Kansas and a general in the Civil War, and obviously a man of cultivation, has left an account of a night passed with Brown at this period, in the midst of all the fighting. They slept in the open air under the same blanket, and talked, certainly in a very unsoldierly manner, all night, about the stars, about politics, about the rights of man. The talk ran on until after midnight, and at last Brown impressed Phillips greatly by telling him, from the evidence of the position of certain stars which were now exactly over their heads, that it was two o'clock; and, without a wink of sleep, Brown called his men, who re-



sponded with alacrity. In less than ten minutes the company had saddled, packed, mounted, and was on the way to Topeka. Brown refused to follow the road, but insisted on taking a straight course across the country, guided only by the stars; and they had a rough time of it, floundering in the thickets and crossing streams.

Brown carried his wounded son-in-law, Henry Thompson, into Iowa, to be taken care of, and in August returned to the Kansas war-path again, doing some sharp skirmishing, at first in company with and under the leadership of James H. Lane. Brown commanded the "Kansas Cavalry" in these encounters. On the 30th of August Brown's son Frederick was shot and killed, apparently in cold blood, by a Pro-slavery preacher named White. The sort of life Brown was leading now, and the work he was doing, is told well in a letter which he wrote from Lawrence to


his wife and children in New York State on the 7th of September, 1856. "I have one moment to write to you," he said, "to say that I am yet alive, that Jason and his family were well yesterday; John and family, I hear, are well, he being yet a prisoner. On the morning of the 30th of August an attack was made by the Ruffians on Osawatomie, numbering some four hundred, by whose scouts our dear Frederick was shot dead without warning, he supposing them to be Free State men, as near as we can learn. One other man, a cousin of Mr. Adair [his son-in-law], was murdered by them about the time that Frederick was killed, and one badly wounded at the same time. At this time I was about three miles off, where I had some fourteen or fifteen men over night that I had just enlisted to service under me as regulars. These I collected as well as I could, with some twelve or fifteen more; and in about three quarters of an hour

I attacked them from a wood with thick undergrowth. With this force we threw them into confusion for about fifteen or twenty minutes, during which time we killed or wounded from seventy to eighty of the enemy — as they say — and then we escaped as well as we could, with one killed while escaping, two or three wounded, and as many more missing. Four or five Free State men were butchered during the day in all. Jason fought bravely by my side during the fight, and escaped with me, he being unhurt. I was struck by a partly spent grape, cannister or rifle shot, which bruised me some, but did not injure me seriously. ‘Hitherto the Lord has helped me,’ in spite of my afflictions. . . . May the God of our Fathers save and bless you all !”

This fight was the one commonly called “the battle of Osawatomie,” though there were two other fights at or near that place. Brown’s methods were-

frankly those of the guerilla. He liberated many slaves, and, as the phrase went in Kansas, incidentally converted many Pro-slavery horses and cattle to Free State principles. At this time a Pro-slavery federal governor, Geary, was vainly trying to reduce the constantly increasing Free State population to submission. Finally, the Missourians and other Southerners raised a force of twenty-seven hundred men for a last attack on the Anti-slavery stronghold, Lawrence. They were resisted by the Free State men in force. Naturally, Brown was there. He assembled the people in the street on September 15, 1856, and made them a speech, which was reported in the papers. It is so good that it could hardly have been an invention: it deserves to rank as a classic amongst fighting exhortations of the sort:—

“Gentlemen,—It is said there are twenty-five hundred Missourians down at



Franklin, and that they will be here in two hours. You can see for yourselves the smoke they are making by setting fire to the houses in that town. Now is probably the last opportunity you will have of seeing a fight, so you had better do your best. If they should come up and attack us, don't yell and make a great noise, but remain perfectly silent and still, wait till they get within twenty-five yards of you, get a good object, be sure you see the hind sight of your gun, then fire. A great deal of powder and lead and very precious time is wasted by shooting too high. You had better aim at their legs than at their heads. In either case, be sure of the hind sights of your guns. It is from neglect of this that I myself have so many times escaped; for, if all the bullets that have been aimed at me had hit, I should have been as full of holes as a riddle."

The Missourians made their onset. Brown commanded the Free State ad-

vance-guard. He had some men armed with nothing but pitchforks, but they were not in the advance line. A brass cannon was brought out to support his rifles. There was some desultory firing ; and then the Missourians, seeing, no doubt, that the Lawrence men were entirely ready for them, withdrew in good order.

Really, the Kansas battle was now won. Free State men had poured into the Territory. Slavery was impossible there : slave property could not be held, largely as the result of Brown's fierce guerilla warfare. He had seen clearly enough that the Territory could not be made a slave State if no slave could be peaceably held there. But now his mission, as the wielder of the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, called him elsewhere. He had a larger field in view. Whether as early as the end of 1856 he contemplated an attack in the neighborhood of Harper's Ferry, is not clearly

known. But he certainly had further and more extensive operations against slavery in mind. To carry them out, it was necessary to have money. There was money, and there were rich abolitionists, in Boston ; and there Brown went to beg. And there he begged with as much pertinacity and insistence as he had fought. There were rifles to buy and move, men to subsist and transport, a blow to be struck.


V.

GEORGE LUTHER STEARNS, a merchant of Boston, resident in the town of Medford close by,—a man of wealth and character and fine spirit,—was the mainspring of John Brown's campaign in Kansas and afterward in Virginia, though he seldom knew, and never took pains to find out, exactly what Brown was doing with his money. There were at work in New England, with their direction centred in Boston, two committees which had much to do with making Kansas a free State,—the Kansas committee of Massachusetts and the New England Emigrant Aid Company. Nominally, their chief work was to colonize men in Kansas who could be depended on to vote against slavery. Towns were established there, and their settlers furnished with arms by these and other Kansas committees. Influential in the work were Mr. Stearns, Dr.

Samuel G. Howe, Dr. Samuel Cabot, Jr., Eli Thayer, and Frank B. Sanborn. Mr. Sanborn was a young man, just out of college, of marked energy, individuality, earnestness and ability, then as now. Brown liked him well, visited him, wrote to him, made use of his abilities in raising money, and finally tried to get him to join him in the Virginia raid. The "friends of Kansas" in Massachusetts bought two hundred Sharpe's rifles and sent them to Brown in Iowa, intending them for use in Kansas. They never went further than an Iowa town named Tabor, where for a time Brown had his headquarters when he was not "operating" in Kansas. We shall see what became of them.

John Brown came to Boston in December, 1856,—the very year of the Pottawatomie killings,—and was hospitably received by some of the most radical of the Anti-slavery men, and especially by Stearns and Sanborn. His

object, as he announced it to these two, and as Sanborn reports it, was to raise money with which to arm and equip a hundred mounted men for defence and reprisal in Kansas. He gave it to be understood, however, that he wished to be at liberty to use the arms and money in his own way. He succeeded in getting a good deal of money. Mr. Stearns gave Brown a good deal of cash, and, first and last, undoubtedly paid him several thousand dollars. Brown had his family at North Elba to support, and naturally expected that, inasmuch as he was giving all his time and much of the time of two or three minor sons to the work, his family should have some support from the committees. His wife and young children certainly had no more at any time than the bare necessities of life. Brown was now Captain John Brown, and a person of such wide reputation that, when he went about on the Kansas business, he found it convenient to



travel under an assumed name ; and his favorite "alias" was "Nelson Hawkins." He made a speech under his own name—for in Massachusetts he could safely be John Brown—before a committee of the Massachusetts legislature and a large audience, urging a State appropriation in support of the Kansas committee's work. It was refused ; but his appeal certainly helped him in his work, and his reception by the legislative committee gave him standing.

Brown visited his family at North Elba in the early spring of 1857, went to Connecticut, made speeches and collected money, got the granite tombstone of his grandfather, Captain John Brown, there and sent it to North Elba to be set up and inscribed with his son Frederick's name, and, eventually, with his own. At Collinsville, in Connecticut, he contracted for the manufacture of a thousand pikes or spears, saying that they were intended for use in Kansas. The

manufacturer exacted pay for the work as he went along ; and the pikes were a long time in preparing. When at last they were finished, they went to Harper's Ferry, not to Kansas. They were a likely weapon for negroes on Southern plantations, who knew little about fire-arms : for ranging frontiersmen on the Kansas plains they were the last sort of weapon that any one would think of. There seems little doubt that Brown's explanation to the Connecticut manufacturer was a subterfuge, and that he intended the pikes for a negro insurrection somewhere. The fact that he paid for them slowly, keeping them hanging, so to speak, a long time, does not indicate that he really intended them for use in Kansas. He found money to pay for them before he needed them in Virginia. He could not prevent the shipment of the two hundred Sharpe's rifles of the Kansas Aid committee as far west as Iowa, but there is fair ground

for presumption that he never intended that they should go any further.

Beating up and down the East in this money-getting work, Brown did another thing that proved he had a new plan, and also, perhaps, showed the influence of his reading of the Life of Oliver Cromwell. Somewhat like Cromwell, he developed military tastes and took up a fighting career late in life, without a military training. When it had become desirable for Cromwell to have something of a soldier's education, he had found an adventurer of Dutch extraction, John Dalbier by name, who had seen much service abroad, and made use of him as a military "coach." In New York Brown met an Englishman, —so he is called, at any rate, though the name betrays Scottish extraction,— named Hugh Forbes, who was said to have been with Garibaldi and to have done good fighting in the European revolutionary attempts of 1848. Brown

seems to have been greatly taken with Forbes, and to have recognized in him his John Dalziel. He made an arrangement with him to instruct him and his "young men" in the military art, at some chosen place, for one hundred dollars a month, advancing him six hundred dollars.

Meantime the political war in Kansas had become lively again, and Brown was implored by several of the leaders to come back to the Territory. He wrote them encouragingly, but was busy accumulating supplies and munitions, and getting them to Tabor and Springdale, Iowa, where he actually assembled "his young men," as he called the devoted band of followers who went with him to Virginia. "Jim" Lane, the military commander of the Free State forces in the Territory, had made Brown a general, and, addressing him as such, begged him to come on with his guns. Brown replied from Tabor that his health would

not permit,— which seems very strange (if he had really intended to go) in a man who had resolutely lived an outlaw's life in Kansas while extremely ill with fever, and had then shown no hesitation about risking his health at every turn. The fact was that he did not wish to put the two hundred precious Sharpe's rifles, which Lane knew he had, and was eagerly trying to get, into the hands of Kansas bushwhackers. He knew that, if he did, he would never get them back again. Nor did he propose to reveal the plan for the Virginia raid to the Kansas people.

The Eastern Anti-slavery folk were also egging Brown on to go to Kansas and "give them some backbone." They were as yet in the dark as to his schemes. These Eastern people had agreed to pay Gerrit Smith one thousand dollars for the farm which Brown's family occupied in the Adirondacks: they did give it at last, but the money came very slowly.

It seems extraordinary at this distance that Smith, a rich man, who certainly spent a great deal of money in the Antislavery cause, and who gave Brown three hundred dollars in cash at about this time, should have been willing to take money nominally from Brown for his rocky acres.

On his way to the West from Ohio, Brown wrote a strange and pathetic letter to his wife and children. "If I should never return," he said, "it is my particular request that no other monument be used to keep me in remembrance than the same plain one that records the death of my grandfather and son; and that a short story, like those already on it, be told of John Brown, the fifth, under that of grandfather." This refers to the tombstone of his grandfather which he had removed from Connecticut to North Elba. The request tells the story of his pride in his Puritan lineage. It betrays his own strong feeling that he

was going to do something which might make his name famous, and that this something was in a high degree hazardous. "I think I have several good reasons for this," he went on in his letter. "I would be glad that my posterity should not only remember their parentage, but also the cause they labored in. I do not expect to leave these parts under four or five days, and will try to write again before I go off. I am much confused in mind, and cannot remember what I wish to write." A long letter which Brown wrote from Iowa to F. B. Sanborn shows that his heart was very heavy at this time. His family were practically unprovided for, ill-lodged, poorly fed, and his young children not at school. He felt strongly that he had parted from them forever. Yet something drove him on irresistibly: no pressure could have made him turn back. He was, moreover, out of conceit with all the leading influences then working


against slavery. The abolitionists, he said, "would never effect anything by their milk-and-water principles," and the Republican party was of no account, since it was opposed to "meddling with slavery" in the States where it existed. For his part, he lived to meddle with it wherever it was. Peace, he said, was but an empty word. He was certainly now preparing to make war.

In September, 1857, he had assembled in Iowa his little company of young men for military instruction under the adventurer Forbes. These young men had for the most part served with him in Kansas: a few were new recruits. They were a chosen lot, of energy and fierce principle, but trusting Brown completely and going unquestioningly where he bade them. Several of them afterward died with him at Harper's Ferry. One of their best was John Henry Kagi, or Keagy, a native of Ohio, of Swiss extraction, a tall young

fellow of twenty-three, with the air of a divinity student, but an agnostic in his religious views, as were most of the company. Kagi had been a teacher and a newspaper correspondent. Another was John Edwin Cook, a young Connecticut Yankee who had studied at Yale, but did not graduate ; a talkative, very captivating fellow, who wrote poor verses and caused Brown some uneasiness by his tendency to prattle. Another was Edwin Coppoc, Quaker-bred, a jolly, brown-eyed youth, but quiet in his ways and the essence of devotion to Brown. Of very much such material as this the whole party was made. The men were inclined to revolutionary radicalism ; they were full of "views," and were a perpetual debating society wherever they went. Brown, the only old man in the group, unlike them in his foundation motive and his manner of life, dominated them completely, and knew that, with all their prattling, they

would die for him. Richard Realf, the poet, and Richard J. Hinton, a journalist, both Englishmen, were for a time in Brown's band. He designed nearly every one of them to be the captain of a black legion, when he should have the blacks raised in rebellion against their masters. His drill-master Forbes had deserted him; and he replaced him with Aaron Dwight Stephens, one of his Kansas fighters, who had been a soldier in the United States army. This man proved true, to the grave.

Cook declares that Brown had told him that the ultimate destination of the expedition was Virginia. Without the knowledge or consent of Mr. Stearns or the other Massachusetts aiders and abettors of his plans, Brown shipped the Sharpe's rifles and revolvers, which had been given him for "work in Kansas," and also other stores, such as blankets and clothing, back to Conneaut, Ohio, on their way to Virginia. No doubt he



knew that Mr. Stearns preferred that he should carry out his own plans without consulting and involving him. Perhaps he did not care what any one thought about it. He communicated his plans gradually to his best trusted "young men." Edwin Coppoc said at Harper's Ferry, "The whole company was opposed to making the first demonstration at Harper's Ferry; but Captain Brown would have his way, and we had to obey orders." Everything seemed going well. Brown intended to strike in April or May, 1858. He went East, visited Frederick Douglass in February, 1858, and sketched quite fully the Virginia plot to him. He had to beg more money from his Massachusetts supporters. He did not disclose his plans to them at this time, only saying that "railroad business," by which, of course, he meant liberating slaves, "on a somewhat extended scale," was his object. Meantime his enemies supposed that he was hiding in Kansas.

He soon came on to Gerrit Smith's house at Peterboro, New York; and to that place on Feb. 22, 1858, F. B. Sanborn and Thomas Wentworth Higginson went, at Brown's urgent invitation. There, to Gerrit Smith, to Higginson, to Sanborn, and to Smith's secretary, Edwin Morton, Brown unfolded a scheme for a raid in Virginia. He read a long "constitution" which he had drawn up for the government he was to establish. It was a wordy, boyish document, and seems to have special reference and adaptation to the negro character. It somewhat paradoxically asserted devotion to the Constitution and flag of the United States. Brown, for that matter, thought of his war as one against the slaveholders, not against the government. He wanted eight hundred dollars to begin the work of his revolution with!


Brown's hearers were thunder-struck, and used every argument they could

think of against the scheme. Hour after hour they talked and contended, Brown answering volubly every objection. "But it is utterly hopeless to undertake so vast a work with such slender means," they exclaimed; and Brown answered, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" In his mind this was answer enough. Besides, he already had his men and his munitions; and they were on their way. The work had begun. He would not give it up.

"You see how it is," said Gerrit Smith: "our dear old friend has made up his mind to this course, and cannot be turned from it. We cannot give him up to die alone; we must support him. I will raise so many hundred dollars for him: you must lay the case before your friends in Massachusetts, and perhaps they will do the same. I see no other way."

There was no other way. It was John Brown's rebellion. The moneyed aboli-

tionists had only to ratify his decision. In connection with this enforced ratification, Mr. Sanborn patly quotes Edwin Coppoc's remark to the authorities at Harper's Ferry: "Ah, gentlemen, you don't know Captain Brown: when *he* wants a man to do a thing, he does it." Brown knew his die was cast. He did not go to North Elba for two months, but visited Boston (whence he carried five hundred dollars in gold), New York and Philadelphia, turning various stones to forward his plans. He wrote to his daughter Ruth, imploring her to let her husband, Henry Thompson, who had fought with him in Kansas, join him again; and though Thompson, who had already been wounded in Kansas, did not go with him once more, his two brothers did. Brown wrote to Sanborn for copies of Plutarch's Lives, Irving's "Life of Washington," the "best Life of Napoleon, and other similar books," together with maps and sta-



tistics of Southern States, for his "young men" to read.

Having made a brief visit to his family, Brown went to Chatham, in Canada West, to organize a conspiracy among the negroes from the United States who had taken refuge there,—a band of men influential among their race. There, in May, he held a secret convention. Twelve of his young men were with him, and there was a small attendance of trusted colored men. Brown's constitution, which he had read at Gerrit Smith's, was submitted to the meeting, and adopted. Brown made a strong speech, declaring his plan in a general way, but saying nothing about Harper's Ferry. In fact, one of the members of the convention has declared that he supposed the "work" was to be done in Kansas. Yet to some at least Brown seems to have made it clear that, when his blow for the negroes had been struck, they would come "to the moun-


tains" to join him, and that there he proposed to operate, making the chain of the Appalachians his base. By flocking to his standard, the blacks would enable him to harass the plantations on either side of the range; and he believed that he could establish impregnable positions in the mountains. He expected that the rising would become general through the Southern States; and, when it had become so, he would organize the freed blacks under his provisional constitution.

Brown was made commander-in-chief under this constitution, John Henry Kagi Secretary of War, Richard Realf Secretary of State, Owen Brown Treasurer, and George B. Gill Secretary of the Treasury. All of these were white; but two colored men were made "members of Congress." The whole organization was the absurdest boys' play, unless we are to consider it a part of Brown's plan to impress the negroes

with high-sounding proceedings of apparent great importance. But Brown was capable of magnificent boyishness on occasion. I am inclined to regard all this as a part of it rather than as a more or less insincere device to dazzle the negroes.

Brown intended to start for Virginia very soon. His own plans were matured. But meantime a great scare had been caused among the Eastern abolitionists by the threat of Hugh Forbes, Brown's late drill-master, to denounce the whole conspiracy to the government if he were not paid certain sums of money. Claiming that Brown had not paid him all he agreed, he conveyed this threat in letters to Senators Wilson and Sumner and other Republicans who were not in the secret. They went to Sanborn and Stearns, and there was wide consternation. Several thought that the whole plan would have to be given up. As a matter of fact, it was put off on this ac-

count for fully a year. Brown was not greatly worried,—certainly not at all alarmed. He used some craft to stay Forbes's hand. He went to Boston, and Stearns induced him not to proceed for a time. It was thought best that Brown should go back to Kansas, apparently to resume his regular work there, but with the real object of confusing Forbes. Meantime Forbes somehow "disappeared," as Hinton, who was one of Brown's men, expresses it, "wholly from our vision." Yet he wrote a communication to the New York *Herald* in October, 1859, and was later somewhat vaguely reported as fighting with Garibaldi again in Italy. It is clear that he never really betrayed the conspiracy to the government. Brown was asked by Stearns to take back to Kansas the arms and munitions that he had collected, but he did not. He went there at the end of June, 1858, empty-handed and with much reluctance, feeling that he was giving up large game for smaller.




VI.

BUT Brown had not been back in Kansas long before he had a trail of fire behind him. He had grown a long white beard, which was, for a time at least, an effectual disguise. He went under the name of Shubel Morgan there, being still an outlaw, and immediately organized a company of fighting men. Disorder and reprisals had by no means ceased. Brown was soon very ill with fever, but for the most part kept the field. His letters show that his thoughts were on the Virginia expedition. Time hung a little heavily on his hands; and, when midwinter came, he made a slave-liberating foray into Missouri which was one of the most brilliant and theatrical exploits of his life.

It was toward the end of December when a negro man came over from Missouri, and told Brown that he, his wife, two children, and another negro man

were to be sold within a day or two, and begged for help to get away. Brown, according to one of his companions, George B. Gill, was waiting for something to turn up, and accepted this call as heaven-sent. He at once organized two parties of men, and within twenty-four hours rode into Missouri. With one of the parties he surrounded the place where the five negroes were kept, and summoned the people to surrender. They did so. Brown took the slaves, and also certain property belonging to the estate, including horses and wagons. He had a theory that this property was made by the labor of the negroes, and rightfully belonged to them. At any rate, they were entitled to means of conveyance. Then he went on to another plantation, seized five more slaves and more of the "negroes' property," and captured two white men. The other party, under Brown's man, Stephens, did not do so well. A white man was



killed while resisting the liberation of a negro, and the party got but one slave.

Brown ran his party of fugitives and captives over into Kansas, liberated his prisoners there, and deliberately organized a flight—with the negroes—to Canada! It was midwinter, and the negro women and children had to be transported in slowly lumbering Conestoga wagons. By this time rewards were offered for Brown even by the Free State authorities of Kansas, so that he was doubly and trebly an outlaw. This attempt would have proved Brown's insanity if he had not actually accomplished the feat. Inasmuch as he accomplished it, it proved his genius.

The Free State men — the best of them, at any rate — gave him shelter and helped him to conceal his captives, but protested against his act. Even Augustus Wattles, a Quaker and a loyal friend of Brown's, said to him: "You ought not to do this. Kansas is too greatly


harassed.” “Well,” answered Brown, “I will soon remove the seat of the trouble elsewhere.” Ottawa Jones, an Indian, who had befriended Brown innumerable times, now sheltered and hid him once more, though his previous aid to Brown had cost him all his earthly possessions, destroyed by the Missourians. Brown went on with his negroes over a frozen road. On the way one of the black women gave birth to a son, who was promptly named John Brown. Knowing that a band of Missourians was lying in wait for him, a party of some twenty-three young Kansans, who had not the fear of the Territory’s rulers and cautious counsellors before their eyes, started out with them. They met the Missourians in ambush on the opposite shore of Muddy creek, covering a ford. They rode straight at them by Brown’s command, and put the whole party to ignominious flight. Five of this valiant party Brown captured and marched with

him a considerable distance. He did not deem it prudent to allow them to ride their horses, lest they should escape and betray his whereabouts ; but, after the very knightly way he had of treating his prisoners, he dismounted and went on foot with them all night, "to show that he meant them no unkindness." In the morning, after he had prayed over them, he told them to make their way back home as best they might. Naturally, he retained their horses ; and we can imagine that the tired men were long in reaching home.

Brown's little party marched on, undergoing fearful hardships. Brown himself was found by a kindly abolitionist on the way to be without underclothing in the frightful cold and snowdrifts. Nobody knew to what negro refugee he had given his own garments. The fugitives were pursued, but they managed to get into Nebraska safely ; and from there on Brown begged his

way, the negroes being met now and then with demonstrations of welcome and rejoicing, but often with cold reprobation. He reached Chatham, Canada, in March, 1859, with all his fugitives alive and well. Then he went to Ohio, and at Cleveland sold his captured Missouri horses and mules at public sale, "warning the purchasers," Mr. Sanborn says, "that there might be a defect in the title."

He made sure that his Virginia stores were safe. His son John had kept the two hundred rifles and other arms and munitions, first in a furniture warehouse at Cherry Valley, Ohio, covered over with ready-made coffins, and then, upon an alarm, in an abolitionist farmer's barn. In the early summer of 1859 John Brown, Jr., shipped them as "hardware" to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, which was only forty-five miles from Harper's Ferry, Virginia. The curtain was about to rise on the last act of the tragedy.



VII.

JOHN BROWN went now, grave and severe, his whole nature breathing a terrible earnestness, to New England, demanding rather than asking fresh support for the reorganization of his band. He talked at Concord Town Hall, and the sight and thought of him inspired Concord to an unwonted fire. He impressed the people with his marvellous simplicity. "He is so transparent," Emerson said, "that all men see him through." Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott went to hear him; and no one of them ever wrote anything better than the praise that each one lavished, at this moment, on the old fanatic. These oracles of Concord spoke of Brown as if they had seen a spirit.

Brown was much at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Stearns at Medford, his truest friends and most generous benefactors and supporters. They endured

ostracism and the scorn of their own kin on his account ; but they knew him to be great, and believed him to be good. He visited Frank B. Sanborn. From all those people and from Gerrit Smith, Brown raised something more than two thousand dollars. He got a brief glimpse of his family at North Elba ; he assembled his "young men" as well as he could, or saw that they had employment where he could call them to him at any moment, and finally, in June, 1859, appeared with his two sons, Owen and Oliver, at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where he set up a fictitious hardware business under the name of Isaac Smith & Sons. This fiction was to enable him to receive and ship "goods." He paid what was still due of the one thousand dollars which he had promised for his pikes in Connecticut, and had this hardware also sent to him at Chambersburg. Then he and his sons went, on July 3, to Har-




per's Ferry, leaving John Henry Kagi in charge of the business at Chambersburg. Brown had had his lieutenant, John E. Cook, living in the vicinity of Harper's Ferry for some time, spying out the ground. The young man had blended himself so thoroughly with the life of the people that he had married a Virginian's daughter. But he left her, and came to John Brown.

Brown and his sons walked about the hilly farming country on the northern side of the Potomac, opposite Harper's Ferry, prospecting for a base of operations. They were Isaac Smith and his two sons; they had been farmers in northern New York, but the frosts there cut off their crops till they were sick of it. They had also made a business of buying up fat cattle and driving them into New York. They thought they could combine this business with a little farming in this favorable region. The Maryland country people, simple-hearted

and hospitable, accepted this explanation without suspicion. The men looked honest and respectable, and spoke well and frankly. Brown hired a farm-house and cabin, called the Kennedy place, in a retired situation amidst the woods about four miles from the Potomac. They took up their residence on this place. Martha Brown, the wife of young Oliver Brown, and Anne, John Brown's daughter, now sixteen years old, came on to keep house for them. The neighborhood people visited them occasionally, and found nothing suspicious about them. But meantime Brown, little by little, was, with consummate cleverness, getting his boxes of rifles and pikes and other munitions down from Chambersburg, partly by wagon and partly by rail, and storing them in the cabin.

Stearns and Sanborn and Gerrit Smith did not know that he was doing these things nor where he was going to strike. They did not want to know what he was



doing, and he was careful not to inform them. He wrote home to his wife a good deal of advice about the farming operations at North Elba. His son Watson, and the brothers of his son-in-law, the two young Thompsons, who were as faithful to him as sons, came on and joined him ; and so did others of the "young men." They spent their time mostly in hiding about the Kennedy place. John Brown, Jr., worked hard in shipping the freight—that is, the war material—to Harper's Ferry and in doing various errands for his father in connection with the business. He went to Canada for him, and to Boston. By the end of August Brown wrote to his son, "Our freight is principally here." About that time Frederick Douglass, the most famous, intelligent, and influential colored man in America, went to Chambersburg to see Brown. This was at Brown's urgent request. In a way, Douglass held the key to the

hearts of the negroes ; and Brown seems to have estimated his influence at a high figure. At the time of the meeting, Brown was fishing in an old flooded stone quarry somewhere near Chambersburg. Douglass has left an account of the interview. It is interesting, and none the less so because, like Douglass's story of his interview with Brown in 1847, it shows some traces of the embellishment of a lively imagination.

Brown, Douglass, Shields Green (a negro whom Douglass had brought with him), and Kagi sat down to talk while Brown fished. Brown frankly declared his purpose to take the United States arsenal at Harper's Ferry, and from there to proceed to the mountains. Douglass opposed the plan earnestly. It would, he said, "be fatal to all engaged ; it would be an attack on the federal government, and would array the whole country against us." Douglass was for starting the movement in

the mountains, and drawing the slaves up there. Brown said he could keep the Virginians off, for a sufficient time, at Harper's Ferry by means of the prominent men whom he would take and hold as hostages, and that the very boldness of the blow would instantly arouse the whole North. And here came another great scene. Neither man could convince the other. Brown, who seemed to suspect a little timidity in Douglass, got up and put his arms around him. "Come with me," he said: "I will defend you with my life! I want you for a special purpose. When I strike, the bees will begin to swarm; and I shall want you to help hive them." Douglass refused. Turning to the plantation negro, Shields Green, who was a runaway slave whom he had harbored, Douglass said, "Well, Green, what have you decided to do?" and the black man answered, "I b'lieve I'll go wid de ole man!" At Harper's Ferry, Green re-

fused to take advantage of an opportunity to escape, and went back and died like a hero with Brown. This man's willing sacrifice of his life was one of many smaller heroic tragedies which were absorbed in the greater one.

Douglass's plan may have been better than Brown's ; but, if he had been a hero, he would have gone when Brown implored him. Douglass's defection was, in a way, a prophecy of the failure of the negro race to support Brown ; but Brown himself was of the type of men who would accept an isolated act like Shields Green's heroic devotion as a favorable omen, disregarding the more significant act of the other. John Brown's own sons disapproved the blow at Harper's Ferry. He confessed to his son Owen that he felt profound discouragement at this opposition, and said to his men, "As you are opposed to the plan of attacking here, I will resign : we will choose another leader, and I will faithfully obey." He


did resign. Within five minutes the band voted for a leader. Brown was unanimously re-elected. The choice of any other man would have been as absurd and as impossible as the election of a successor for Bonaparte before Austerlitz. From that time forward there was no talk of any other plan than his.

The time was near in which the women must be sent away. The blow was ready. Brown wrote on September 8 to his wife and children at North Elba, who were consulting him about details of farm management: "It now appears likely that Martha and Anne will be on their way home in the course of a month, but they may be detained to a little later period. I do not know what to advise about fattening the old spotted cow, as much will depend on what you have to feed her with, whether your heifers will come in or not next spring, also upon her present condition. You must exercise the best judgment you have in the

*from
above*

matter, as I know but little about your crops. I should like to know more as soon as I can."

"The girls," who had been of immense service, who kept discreet watch over the prattling conspirators in the house and hustled them out of sight on occasion, and who turned aside local suspicion by their sweet and honest ways, went home early in October. Meantime scenes of extraordinary strangeness were enacting at and around the Kennedy place. Eighteen or twenty men, mostly white, with three or four colored, were packed away there. They played checkers, sang sentimental songs, studied military books, put their large stock of weapons into order, and argued much and volubly on religious questions. Brown conducted some form of religious worship every day, though his adherents were mostly free thinkers. There was a little congregation of Dunkers, or Winebrennarians, who held meetings in a




school-house not far away; and Brown went and exhorted and preached to them. Meantime he worried lest Cook's loquacity should get him into trouble. Some of the neighbors saw negroes at the place, and suspected that old Isaac Smith and his sons were running off slaves. But they did nothing about it. The habitual apathy and indolence of the Maryland population fought on Brown's side.

A more alarming thing happened, though Brown knew nothing of it. Some one sent anonymously from Cincinnati a letter to Mr. Floyd, Secretary of War, warning him, in so many words, that "Old John Brown, late of Kansas," had a party ready with which he was about to "pass down through Pennsylvania and Maryland and enter Virginia at Harper's Ferry, with the purpose of liberating and arming slaves." It was, on the whole, a very accurate betrayal of the whole scheme. There have been

various conjectures as to the way in which this information got out. The identity of the man who sought to betray the secret is now pretty well known. It does not matter who he was. The wonder is that the secret was not betrayed sooner. But once more the Southern *dolce far niente* came to Brown's aid. Secretary Floyd received this letter while he was pleasuring at a watering-place, glanced it over, filed it away as if it were a paper of some importance, and did nothing more about it. The paper came out only after the blow had been struck.

Brown ran over to Philadelphia on the 10th or 11th of October, and met there Francis Jackson Merriam, a young man of good family in Boston, who at once definitely and enthusiastically joined the desperate expedition. Brown sent Merriam to Baltimore to buy forty thousand percussion caps, and the merchant who sold them was allowed



to suppose that they were intended for a filibustering expedition to Nicaragua. These caps went safely to Harper's Ferry; and Merriam, who was said to be in feeble health, and who was the only "gentleman," in the old sense of the word, in the party, joined the band at the Kennedy place as its humblest member.

On Sunday, October 16, Brown rose early, and called all his men to worship. There were now twenty-two or twenty-three men in the house. There is radical disagreement as to whether or not one John Anderson, a negro, was present. There is no proof that he was there. Without him there were twenty-two men. John Brown was commander-in-chief. John Henry Kagi was his adjutant and lieutenant. Aaron Dwight Stephens, Owen Brown, Watson Brown, Oliver Brown, John Edwin Cook, and Charles Plummer Tidd were "captains"; that is, they were to bear that

rank in the negro army which was soon to be organized. William Henry Leeman, Albert Hazlett, Jeremiah G. Anderson, Edwin Coppoc, William Thompson, and Dauphin Thompson were lieutenants. The private soldiers were Shields Green, Dangerfield Newby, John A. Copeland, Osborne Perry Anderson, and Sherrard Lewis Leary, negroes, and Steward Taylor, Barclay Coppoc, and Francis Jackson Merriam, white men. This gentleman of Boston came last of all in Brown's honorable roster. Brown read a chapter in the Bible, and uttered an earnest prayer for the success of his expedition. The men ate a solemn breakfast, after which Brown called the roll of his band. A sentinel was placed at the door ; and a "council meeting" was held, with Osborn P. Anderson, a colored man, in the chair. But the orders which were to govern the proceedings of the next night and day were submitted by Brown.

Every man's duty for at least twenty-four hours had been carefully assigned him. Three men—Owen Brown, Merriam, and Barclay Coppoc, were ordered to remain at the house and guard the arms. All the rest were to proceed, as soon as it was dark, silently to Harper's Ferry, their weapons kept out of sight. Two men were to step aside before the bridge over the Potomac was reached, and tear down the telegraph wire. Two men were to seize and hold the ferry watchman, and two others to remain on guard on the Potomac bridge and two on the Shenandoah bridge until morning. Two were to occupy the fire engine-house in the heart of the town, while Hazlett and others were to capture the United States armory. Stephens, with men, was to go out into the country and capture Colonel Lewis Washington, a descendant of George Washington's brother, free his negroes, seize as much of his property as was

available, and turn him and his negroes over to the negro Osborn Anderson, who was to bring them to the Ferry. Brown himself was to go ahead of the band from the Kennedy place, in a wagon loaded with arms, and was to remain at Harper's Ferry in command. Stephens, with a gang of his liberated negroes and horses and wagons, was to go back to the Kennedy place, and bring down the rifles, pikes, and other materials stored there. Brown expected soon to have negro hands into which to put every one of his one hundred and ninety-four rifles and one thousand pikes.


The council over and his orders promulgated to the band, it is asserted that Brown went quietly over to the little Dunker chapel and preached to the simple believers there. But it was not later than eight o'clock in the evening when he set out in his wagon, eighteen men following in pairs behind him, for Har-

per's Ferry. His only speech before the departure was this: "Men, get on your arms: we will proceed to the Ferry." He had a sledge-hammer and a crow-bar thrown into the wagon. Always a little bit of a fetichist, Brown got out an old cap which he had worn in Kansas and put it on. He mounted the wagon, said, "Come, boys," and drove down the road. The night was cold and dark. Before morning rain fell.

They reached the covered bridge over the Potomac without adventure, crossed until they were near the Virginia side, and were there challenged by the solitary watchman. They seized and held him; and no alarm was given. The bridge was left under guard of Watson Brown and Taylor. John Brown, with the main party, went on to the armory gate, broke it down with sledge-hammer and crow-bar, and entered the yard. A watchman came out in alarm, and was promptly seized. Brown sent one small

party to capture a building called the rifle-works about half a mile from the armory proper, and another to occupy the arsenal. By this time the whole village was practically in Brown's hands, and not a shot had been fired. A considerable number of citizens had been picked up, but there was no general alarm. About midnight an Irish watchman came down to relieve the other watchman on the railroad bridge over the Shenandoah, and found Oliver Brown and William Thompson in charge. He resisted arrest, and Thompson fired at him, the bullet grazing his scalp. This shot alarmed many of the people in the town, who awoke to find the place firmly in the possession of a band of men of whose purposes and motives they knew absolutely nothing.

Stephens and Anderson brought in Colonel Lewis Washington and his negroes and some neighboring slave-owners. Brown, who had set up his



headquarters at the armory, received these Virginians in a very courtly manner, and conducted them to a fire. Stephens had brought from Washington's house a sword which Frederick the Great of Prussia had sent as a gift to General George Washington, and which Lewis Washington had inherited. Brown took this sword, and carried it proudly until he was himself made a prisoner. Colonel Washington was much impressed by Brown's manner, and had no doubt at all that the wearer of his ancestral sword was in command of a large force.

At half-past one in the morning a train came in from the west. It halted at the bridge, finding the lights extinguished. A negro porter, who was sent forward to see what was the matter, refused to halt when challenged by the guard, and was shot and mortally wounded. Brown committed the mistake, which from this distance is inexplicable, of letting this train go on to

Washington before morning with the news of his foray. He had, either from motives of policy or because it was natural to him, adopted a somewhat grand and condescending manner toward these people. He knew he was playing a tremendous game of "bluff." In the main, he played it very well; but he "bluffed" too far. He himself walked over the bridge with the conductor of the train, to satisfy him that it was safe; for the man suspected a trap. The train sped on, to Brown's ruin.

The morning dawned with Brown in full possession of the town. Many of the citizens had not been awakened at all. Captain Dangerfield, the clerk of the armory, came to his office to begin his day's work without any knowledge of what had happened, and fell into the hands of the raiders. He thought they were crazy men. Brown's men, reinforced by a few negroes from Washington's plantation, were busy making




prisoners. But, meantime, other citizens were arming themselves and spreading the alarm about the country. The attempt was now locally recognized as a negro insurrection under the lead of an unknown white man, who was called "Captain Smith." The train which he had allowed to proceed was bearing the news to Washington and Baltimore. The first accounts published in the papers stated that the insurgents were commanded by "one Captain Anderson, who is about sixty years of age, with a heavy white beard,—cool, collected, and with a determined and desperate demeanor." These stories showed how wholly by surprise the attack had taken the country, and how completely "Old John Brown" of Kansas had been lost sight of.

Brown's time had now come to leave the town and take to the mountains. Authorities agree that he might have done this safely at any time up to nine

o'clock on Monday morning, and probably he might have escaped at any time before noon. By that time he had been completely invested, in a little town hemmed in by a broad river and high hills. Why did he not go? A great deal of conjecture has been wasted on this point. A newspaper reported him as saying this, after his arrest: "A lenient feeling towards the citizens led me to parley with them as to a compromise; and by prevarication on their part I was delayed until attacked, and then in self-defence was compelled to entrench myself." He certainly never admitted that his sacrifice of himself and his men was deliberate; but he never lamented it, and to his brother Frederick he wrote after his condemnation, "I am fully persuaded that I am worth inconceivably more to hang than for any other purpose."

There was scattered fighting all that forenoon of October 17. Brown ran




his prisoners into the engine-house, where there were small windows and port-holes which he could fire through. Several of his men, including his son Watson and William Thompson, were shot and captured about the town. On their part, his men killed several of the townspeople. Some Maryland militia came up, across the Potomac, but were beaten back for a little time. Several companies of Virginia militia arrived at Harper's Ferry in the course of the day. The little garrisons at the rifle-works and the armory were killed or captured, with the exception of two men who escaped. The bodies of Kagi, Leary, and Thompson were hurled savagely into the Potomac River. Owen Brown, the Bostonian Merriam, and Barclay Coppoc, who were trying to move the arms down from the Kennedy farm, found themselves cut off, and, after some shooting from a distance, fled to the North.

When Brown finally barricaded him-

self in the engine-house, he had but six men with him. Bullets came whizzing through the windows and doors. One of Brown's sons fell, and died in a moment. Captain Dangerfield, in his story of the fight in the engine-house, says of this incident : "Brown did not leave his post at the port-hole ; but, when the fighting was over, he walked to his son's body, straightened out his limbs, took off his trappings, and then turned to me and said, 'This is the third son I have lost in this cause.' Another son had been shot in the morning, and was then dying, having been brought in from the street. Often during the affair in the engine-house, when his men would want to fire upon some one who might be seen passing, Brown would stop them, saying, 'Don't shoot : that man is unarmed.' "


Brown took sufficiently good care of his prisoners so that none of them were hurt. They all gave him credit afterward for perfect intrepidity and coolness.



Early in the evening Colonel Robert E. Lee and Lieutenant J. E. B. Stuart, both of them afterward famous as Confederate generals, arrived by train from Washington with a company of United States marines. Stuart came into the engine-house with a light, under a flag of truce, to parley. He exclaimed, on seeing Brown, "Why, aren't you old Osawatomie Brown of Kansas, whom I once had there as my prisoner?" "Yes," said Brown; "but you did not keep me." This was the first intimation that the Harper's Ferry people had of Brown's identity. Stuart advised Brown to "trust to the clemency of the government"; but Brown answered, "I prefer to die just here." After two more of his men had been killed, and more parleying had taken place, the marines got a ladder, and, using it as a battering ram, burst in the engine-house door and poured into the room. Lieutenant Israel Green, of the marines, leaped

upon Brown, struck him heavily with his sabre in the head and face, cutting and striking him several times after he was down, and inflicting wounds which were at first supposed to be mortal.

Brown was soon in the presence of the Governor of Virginia, Henry S. Wise, of Colonel Lee, and of a crowd of functionaries and reporters, being subjected, as he lay wounded and bleeding, to a cross-examination as to his intentions and purposes. We who have followed his career know what his purposes were. Under this riddling fire of questions, Brown's battered head was perfectly clear. He summed the matter all up in this sentence: "We are abolitionists from the North, come to take and release your slaves." The politicians tried to get out of him something incriminating the Republican leaders of the North. Of course they did not succeed; for he had had nothing to do with these. Apparently, his questioners knew nothing



of Stearns and the rest who were really concerned.

A long report of his interview with Senator Mason of Virginia, Clement Vallandigham, J. E. B. Stuart, and others, printed in the New York *Herald*, was probably in the main correct. The responses attributed in it to Brown are all characteristic of him. His clean-cut expressions flash out from the others' words like fire. The report is a classic, quite fit to be put in the reading-books. "Who sent you here?" asked Vallandigham. "No man sent me here," said Brown. "I acknowledge no master in human form." "Did you get up the expedition yourself?" "I did." He was asked "how long he had been engaged in this business," and he answered fully and truly, "From the breaking out of the difficulties in Kansas." When they began to question Stephens, who was also wounded, Brown warned him to be cautious in his answers. "You had

better," he said, lifting his bleeding head and surveying the crowd about him,— "you had better, all you people of the South, prepare yourselves for a settlement of this question,— this negro question: the end of that is not yet."

"These wounds were inflicted upon me," he also said, "both sabre cuts on my head and bayonet stabs in different parts of my body, some minutes after I had ceased fighting and had consented to surrender for the benefit of others, not for my own." We may observe that Brown took note of the fact that he had been struck by a sabre, not an officer's customary sword. An officer of marines would have been more likely to carry a sword than a sabre; but it happened that Lieutenant Green did carry a sabre. Brown seems to have watched the blade that fell upon his head and face.


The Virginians were anxious to know whether his intention was to free the slaves there or to carry them off; and



he declared that it was his intention to set them free, not to carry them off. "But to set them free would sacrifice the life of every man in this community," he was told by one; and he answered, "I do not think so." "You are fanatical!" exclaimed the Virginian. "And I," answered Brown, "think you are fanatical. 'Whom the Gods would destroy, they first make mad'; and you are mad." This the Virginians could not understand. It was to them crazy talk.

One man knew that Brown was not crazy, and that was Governor Henry S. Wise. Wise was a strong man, of large mental measure. He recognized a man of like measure in Brown. He said to him oracularly, after his wont: "Mr. Brown, the silver of your hair is reddened by the blood of crime; and you should think upon eternity. You are suffering from wounds perhaps fatal; and, should you escape death from these

causes, you must submit to a trial which may involve death. Your confessions justify the presumption that you will be found guilty. It is better that you should turn your attention to your eternal future." And Brown answered gravely, taking up a little of the grandiose tone of his tormentor, but improving on it with fine Yankee humor: "Governor, I have, from all appearances, not more than fifteen or twenty years the start of you on the journey to that eternity of which you kindly warn me; and, whether my time here shall be fifteen months or fifteen days or fifteen hours, I am equally prepared to go. There is an eternity behind and an eternity before; and the little speck in the centre, however long, is but comparatively a minute. The difference between your tenure and mine is trifling, and I therefore tell you to be prepared. I am prepared. You all have a heavy responsibility, and it behooves you to prepare more than it does me."



“They are mistaken,” Wise said soon afterward in a public speech at Richmond, “who take Brown to be a madman. He is a bundle of the best nerves I ever saw,—cut and thrust and bleeding and in bonds. He is a man of clear head, of courage, fortitude, and simple ingenuousness. He is cool, collected, and indomitable. It is but just to say that he was humane to his prisoners, and he inspired me with great trust in his integrity as a man of truth.”

Brown's sons, Watson and Oliver, were by this time dead, as were also William and Dauphin Thompson, Kagi, Leeman, Taylor, Leary, Jeremiah Anderson, and Newby. Owen Brown, Cook, Tidd, Barclay Coppoc, Merriam, Hazlett, and Osborn Anderson were fugitives, Cook and Hazlett being captured and brought back for trial. The bodies of some of the dead were atrociously and revoltingly maltreated. Several of the bodies, after being dragged and thrown about,

were sent to the medical college at Winchester for dissection. The five men named above were the only men of the party who escaped death in the fighting or on the gallows.

For Brown, of course, was tried, and swiftly convicted of "treason, and conspiring and advising with slaves and others to rebel, and of murder in the first degree," and was sentenced to death. The trial, which took place at Charlestown, six miles from Harper's Ferry, was opened on October 26; and the verdict of conviction was brought in on November 2. The proceedings, though swift, were not unseemly, and not unduly summary, considering the excitement of the Virginians, and their great fear that a rescue would be attempted from the North.

Brown was fairly well defended, though by no strong or famous or highly gifted counsel. He lay on a mattress in the court-room, in heavy

chains, and gave his testimony from this pallet. While in his cell, he was kept constantly and very heavily chained to the floor. He denounced to the court his lawyer's plea of insanity in his behalf, declaring it to be "a miserable artifice." His wounds and general health improved during his trial and confinement. A very strong guard of militia was kept over him, and in the streets of Charlestown and in Harper's Ferry. He refused to encourage an attempt to rescue him, which might very likely have been made if he had been willing, saying at once, "I think that my great object will be nearer its accomplishment by my death than by my life"; and by and by he said, after reflection, "I would not walk out of the prison if the door was left open."

He was sentenced to be hung at Charlestown on December 2. During the month that he lay heavily chained, awaiting execution, he slept as calmly


as a child every night, and grew stronger. He wrote a great many letters, all of which appear to have been faithfully forwarded. Several of these were to his wife, who just before his execution came to see him, against his advice, and was admitted once, and went away. His letters from his prison were dignified, solemn, and somewhat wordy, as if this terrible situation, and the opportunity to express himself which all this letter-writing afforded, had led him to abandon his customary succinctness of expression. He wrote not one letter to his old abolitionist correspondents and supporters, knowing that to write to them would direct suspicion toward these men. But to Mary Stearns, wife of his chief benefactor, at Medford, he did write a very simple, eloquent letter of farewell.

On the appointed day Brown was taken to the gallows in a wagon, in the presence of a great force of Virginian

soldiery of all arms. From the seat of the wagon he had a prospect of the great hills,—Appalachian brothers of those amidst which he was born, had made his home at North Elba, and had already ordered that his body should be buried. He paid no attention to the crowd and the soldiery, but those hills filled him with new emotion. “This is a beautiful country,” he exclaimed to his attendants. “I have not cast my eyes on it before; that is, in this direction.” The best Virginian account of his execution is that written by Parke Poindexter, then a soldier in the Richmond company of militia, who held the “post of honor” at the gallows, and was afterward a colonel in the Confederate army. “I witnessed the whole proceeding,” says Poindexter. “Brown mounted the scaffold as calmly and quietly as if he had been going to his dinner. He did not exhibit the slightest excitement or fear.

Not a muscle moved, nor was there the slightest nervous excitement. He stood erect and calm, as if he were upon post."

This was not the end of John Brown, as all the world knows. His name and his strange, direct, simple influence were soon imbedded in the history and song of his country. I have repeated above what the large-minded Governor Wise of Virginia said of Brown, when he was in prison and in chains. It was in praise of Brown's honesty and courage. More than four years afterward, when the Civil War had been fought and its results were declared, a Union general, in Wise's presence, mentioned the name of John Brown. Whereupon the Virginian quickly said: "John Brown? John Brown was a great man, sir. John Brown was a great man!"



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III. A VOICE FROM HARPER'S FERRY. By Osborn Perry Anderson. (Boston, 1861 : Privately printed.)

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