



THE STORY OF JOHN BROWN.

The opposition of the North to slavery was rapidly growing. In the eyes of some, slavery was an enormous sin, fitted to bring the curse of God upon the land. To others it was a political evil, marring the unity and hindering the progress of the country. To very many, on the one ground or the other, it was becoming hateful. Politicians sought to delay by concessions the inevitable crisis. Simple men, guiding themselves by their conviction of the wickedness of slavery, were growing ever more vehement in their hatred of this evil thing.

## *The Story of John Brown.*

John Brown was such a man. The blood of the Pilgrim Fathers flowed in his veins. The old Puritan spirit guided all his actions. From his boyhood he abhorred slavery. He was constrained by his duty to God and man to spend himself in this cause. There was no hope of advantage in it ; no desire for fame ; no thought at all for himself or for his children. He saw a huge wrong, and he could not help setting himself to resist it. He was powerless to influence the councils of the nation. But he had the old Puritan aptitude for battle. He went to Kansas with his sons to help in the fight for freedom ; and while there was fighting to be done, John Brown was at the front. He was a leader among the free settlers, who felt his military superiority, and followed him with confidence in many a bloody skirmish. He retired habitually into deep solitudes to pray. He had morning and evening prayers, in which all his followers joined. He would allow no man of immoral character in his camp. He believed that God directed him in visions ; that he was God's servant, and not man's. The work given him to do might be bitter to the flesh, but since it was God's work he dared not shrink from it.

When the triumph of freedom was secured in Kansas, John Brown moved eastward to Virginia. He declared war against his country, in so far as the national support of slavery was concerned. He prepared a constitution and a semblance of government. He himself was the head of this singular organization. Associated with him were a secretary of state, a treasurer, and a secretary of war. Slavery, he stated, was a barbarous and unjustifiable war, carried on by one section of the community against another. His new government was for the defence of those whom the laws of the country wrongfully left undefended. He was joined by a few enthusiasts like-minded with himself. He laid up store of arms. He and his friends hung about

plantations, and aided the escape of slaves to Canada.

Brown meditated war upon a somewhat extensive scale, and only waited the reinforcements of which he was assured, that he might proclaim liberty to all the captives in his neighborhood. But reason appeared for believing that his plans had been betrayed to the enemy, and Brown was hurried into measures which brought swift destruction upon himself and his followers.

Harper's Ferry was a town of five thousand inhabitants, nestling amid steep and rugged mountains, where the Shenandoah unites its waters with those of the Potomac. The national armory was here, and an arsenal in which were laid up enormous stores of arms and ammunition. Brown resolved to seize the arsenal. It was his hope that the slaves would hasten to his standard when the news of his success went abroad. And he seems to have reckoned that he would become strong enough to make terms with the government, or, at the worst, to secure the escape to Canada of his armed followers.

One Sunday evening in October, he marched into Harper's Ferry with a little army of twenty-two men, black and white, and easily possessed himself of the arsenal. He cut the telegraph wires. He stopped the trains which here cross the Potomac. He made prisoners of the workmen who came in the morning to resume their labors at the arsenal. His sentinels held the streets and bridges. The surprise was complete, and for a few hours his possession of the government works was undisputed.

When at length the news of this amazing rebellion escaped, and America learned that old John Brown had invaded and conquered Harper's Ferry, the Virginians, upon whom the affront fell most heavily, took

prompt measures to avenge it. By noon on Monday a force of militia-men surrounded the little town, to prevent the escape of those whom, as yet, they were not strong enough to capture. Before night fifteen hundred men were assembled. All that night Brown held his conquest. Nearly all his men were wounded or slain. His two sons were shot dead. Brown, standing beside their bodies, calmly exhorted his men to be firm, and sell their lives as dearly as possible. On Tuesday morning the soldiers forced an entrance, and Brown, with a sabre-cut in his head, and two bayonet-stabs in his body, was a prisoner. He was tried and condemned to die. Throughout his imprisonment, and even amid the horrors of the closing scene, his habitual serenity was undisturbed.

To the enraged slave-owners John Brown was a detestable rebel. To the abolitionists he was a martyr. To the historian he is a true, earnest, but most ill-judging man. His actions were unwise, unwarrantable ; but his aims were noble, his self-devotion was heroic.