

## John Brown's Band

One day late in October, of the year 1856, there rode into the town of West Branch an elderly man, weary and travel-stained. He was mounted on a mule and led a horse. He made his way to the only tavern in the place, over the entrance to which hung the sign, "The Traveler's Rest." This tavern was kept by a genial, rosy-cheeked Quaker by the name of James Townsend. On dismounting the traveler asked his host: "Have you ever heard of John Brown of Kansas?" According to the story, Townsend, without replying, took from his vest pocket a piece of chalk and, removing Brown's hat, marked it with a large X; he then replaced the hat and solemnly decorated the back of Brown's coat with two large X marks; lastly he placed an X on the back of the mule. Brown in this way having been admitted to the tavern free list, Townsend said: "Friend, put the animals in that stable and walk into the house; thee is surely welcome."

Brown had just come from the stirring scenes of Kansas Territory: from the battle of Black Jack, fought in the preceding June, and from Osawatomie and the Lawrence foray, events that then were but a few weeks past; and the suggestion has



been made that in Brown's narrative of his Kansas adventures worthy James Townsend received a full equivalent for the buckwheat cakes and "sorghum" for which his hostelry was famous, and to which on this occasion John Brown doubtless did ample justice. Be that as it may, it is certain that, during Brown's short stay in West Branch, he heard of Springdale and of the strong anti-slavery sentiment of its shrewd, thrifty, Quaker population; for henceforth this village became one of his places of frequent resort.

Late in November, 1857, John Brown, accompanied by several men who had fought with him in Kansas, came to the Quaker settlement on their way east where Brown planned to establish a military school preparatory to making "a bloody spot at another place to be talked about" like "bleeding Kansas." It had been his purpose to stop at Springdale merely long enough to sell his teams and wagons, and then to proceed by rail to Ash-tabula County, Ohio. But the panic of 'fifty-seven had begun and money was scarce. He was nearly out of funds, and unable to raise any. Under these circumstances he decided to spend the winter at the village.

Brown was more than welcome, and so were his men. To the Quakers he and his band stood as the embodiment of the sentiment against human slavery which that sect so firmly held. To be sure, John Brown and his followers were not men of



peace; they, one and all of them, had fought hard and often in the Kansas war; but much was pardoned to them by the Quakers because of the holiness of their object; for, while the Quaker would not concede that bloodshed ever was right, it was with extreme leniency that he chid him who had shed blood to liberate the slave.

Brown's band, composed of John H. Kagi, Aaron D. Stephens, John E. Cook, Richard Realf, Charles P. Tidd, Luke F. Parsons, Charles W. Moffat, William H. Leeman, Owen Brown, and a negro, Richard Richardson, who had been picked up at Tabor, were given quarters in the house of William Maxson which was situated about three miles northeast of the village. Maxson himself was not a Quaker, and the direct responsibility of housing men-at-arms was thus avoided by this Quaker community. Brown, however, was received into the house of the good Quaker, John H. Painter, who became his ardent supporter.

The time spent in Springdale was a time of genuine pleasure to Brown's men. They enjoyed its quiet, as also the rural beauty of the village and the gentle society of the people. There were long winter evenings to be passed in hospitable homes; evenings marked by discussions of slavery or by stories of perils and escapes on the border.

Then, in turn, there was the pleasure — not unmixed with a certain wonder and awe — which was afforded to the villagers by the presence



among them of men of such striking parts and individuality as were these followers of John Brown. It was not every village that was favored with the society of a John Henri Kagi, for instance, a man of thought and of varied accomplishments — a stenographer, among other things, and, at one time, correspondent in Kansas for the *New York Post*; or of an Aaron D. Stephens, a man who had served in the United States Army, been sentenced by a court-martial to be shot for assaulting an officer who it was said was brutally chastising one of the men, but had escaped and was now enlisted with Brown under the name of G. Whipple; or of a Richard Realf, elloquent, poetic, impetuous, claiming to have been the especial *protégé* of Lady Noel Byron, and suspected of having been mixed up in foreign political troubles; or of a John Edwin Cook, also poetic, handsome in flowing hair, a masterly penman, lily fingered perhaps, but courageous and a crack shot.

It was not all play for Brown's men while in Springdale. Brown himself never for a moment lost sight of the great end which he had in view. Aaron D. Stephens was appointed drill-master, and a regular daily routine of military study and drill insisted upon. Five o'clock was the rising hour; immediately after breakfast study was begun and continued until nine or ten o'clock; books were then laid aside and the men drilled in the school of the soldier on the broad sward to the



east of the Maxson house. In the afternoon a sort of combined gymnastics and company maneuvers were practiced, the object of which apparently was to inure the men to the strain of running, jumping, vaulting, and firing in different and difficult attitudes. Among other exercises was a sword drill which was performed with long wooden sabres, one of which — the one used by Owen Brown — is still preserved in the Maxson family.

Tuesday and Friday evenings were set apart for the proceedings of a mock legislature of the "State of Springdale" which had been organized. The sessions were held either in the large sitting-room of the Maxsons, or in the larger room of the district school building, a mile and a half away. There were a speaker, a clerk of the House, and regular standing committees. Bills were introduced, referred, reported back, debated with intense earnestness and no little ability, and finally brought to vote. Some of the measures were "to render operative the inalienable right of women to the elective franchise," "to make null and void the Fugitive Slave law of this State," "to appropriate 50,000 acres of land, to be divided into small farms for the benefit of fugitives from slavery," and "to establish a college for classical, physiological, and political education of women." Other questions debated were: "*Resolved*, That a prohibitory liquor law is both wise and practical"; "That the law for the organization of the grand



jury be and hereby is repealed"; and "That John Brown is more justly entitled to the sympathy and honor of this nation than George Washington." Kagi was the keenest debater, and Realf and Cook orators of very considerable powers.

The other evenings of the week were passed by each one according to his fancy. There were the good substantial homesteads of the Painters, the Lewises, the Varneys, the Gills, that could be visited; or Richard Realf had consented to address the Lyceum at Pedee, and all Springdale was going to hear him — this in part for the pleasure there was in listening to so good a speaker, but more perhaps because of the anti-slavery views to which in all probability he would give utterance, to the dismay of the Pedeeites.

It is perhaps not surprising that, under conditions such as these, some of the hardy fellows of Brown's command should have been visited by thoughts of love. All were bachelors, and, moreover, all were young — between eighteen and thirty. Even Owen Brown, who seems to have been a bachelor from principle and who never married, went so far as to divulge the fact that there was one maiden near Springdale whom he would marry, if he ever married at all, but to whom, out of abundant caution, he had resolved never even to speak.

At the time John Brown's band was staying at Springdale, there were living with their mother in



a quaint frame house in the village, two young men of strong character, Edwin and Barclay Coppoc. Edwin was twenty-four years old and Barclay twenty. Barclay, being in danger from consumption, had found it necessary to travel, and for a time had served with a Company of Liberator's in Kansas. They both took much interest in Brown, his men, and his cause, and at length enlisted under his leadership.

On April 27, 1858, Brown returned from the East with some funds in hand and more promised, and gave orders for the expedition to move. He wrote to his wife: "We start from here to-day, and shall write you again when we stop, which will be in two or three days." Their destination proved to be Chatham, Canada West.

The leave-taking between them and the people of Springdale was one of tears. Ties which had been knitting through many weeks were sundered, and not only so, but the natural sorrow at parting was intensified by the consciousness of all that the future was full of hazard for Brown and his followers. Before quitting the house and home of Mr. Maxson where they had spent so long a time, each of Brown's band wrote his name in pencil on the wall of the parlor, where years afterward, the writing could still be seen. The old house, which was built of cement and gravel in 1839, stood for almost a century before falling in ruins.

IRVING B. RICHMAN