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JOHN BROWN IN RICHARDSON COUNTY.

By A. R. Keim.

[Communicated to the Society.]*

In 1855 John Brown went to Kansas "for the sole purpose of fighting if need be for liberty." He soon had occasion to teach the "Border Ruffians" that he could strike hard blows in behalf of free homes and an enslaved race. In repeated encounters, with a handful of men, he worsted the pro-slavery forces that came against him, and his success at the battle of Black Jack, and Ossawatomie, and Lawrence made old John Brown of Ossawatomie, one of the foremost men of Kansas. The Missouri slave holders recognized him as the most vigorous and uncompromising of all their enemies. He was the most to be feared, because on all matters pertaining to this contest his convictions were intensely sincere. He believed in the god of battles and conceived his mission in life to be to free the slaves. In religion and conduct he was a puritan of the sternest sect. He was sixth in descent from Peter Brown, who landed from the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock in 1620, and the same motive that induced his ancestor to flee from the tyranny and persecution of king and clergy actuated John Brown to begin an armed resistance to the slave power—the love of liberty. He was true to the inherited instincts of his race, and in the language of James Redpath "He planted his feet on the Rock of Ages, the eternal truth, and was therefore never shaken in his policy or principles." He was not satisfied merely to defend Kansas against invasion, but, leagued with kindred spirits, carried on a predatory warfare against Missouri, releasing slaves and aiding them to escape to a place where their freedom would be secure. To get these freed men away from Missouri is what brought John Brown to Richardson county. A passage for him through Missouri was impossible, and to reach Canada, it was necessary to make a wide detour through Nebraska and Iowa, where public sentiment was on the side of the runaway slaves, and though Judge Taney had held that good citizens ought to return these fugitives, the people of Falls City in those early

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days thought otherwise; consequently a warm friendship grew up between our people and Brown. He had been in Kansas somewhat more than a year when he made his first trip to Falls City. It was in the autumn of 1855 that his wagon, containing a single fugitive slave, crossed the Nemaha near the falls. He was on his way to New England in search of aid and friends to use in the Kansas troubles. A large portion of the journey was made in his wagon. It was on this trip he made the preliminary survey of the famous underground railroad, which afterwards became well worn by the feet of those who fled in fear and trembling from cruel task-masters. A route along the Missouri river was impracticable, for Leavenworth, Atchison, and other river towns were full of pro-slavery men, as was also Lecompton, on the Kaw, and then, too, the Iowa Sac and Fox Indian reservation stretched directly across this route. The negroes were afraid of the Indians, and perhaps they had good grounds for their fear. Doniphan, only a short distance from Atchison, was a hot-bed for abolitionists, among whom were Gen. Lane, afterwards U. S. Senator, James Redpath, the historian, and John Martin, present governor of Kansas. This town would have been on the river route, but taking all things into consideration it was thought to have too many pitfalls for the unwary African.

Most of the fugitives were started from near Topeka, Kan.; traveling a little west of north, they came to Syracuse, whence the course was slightly east of north until Falls City was reached. Three or four days were usually required to make this journey. Nemaha City was the second station in Nebraska, and the Missouri was crossed at Brownville and Nebraska City, usually Nebraska City. At Tabor, Iowa, the fugitives were comparatively safe, and there they were outfitted for Canada, the money for this purpose coming largely from Puritan New England. Brown had trusty friends along the way to whom fugitives applied for food and protection and direction from one station to another. The old hotel that once stood on Ed. Bell's corner was the head-quarters of John Brown, Gen. Lane, and other anti-slavery men who frequented Falls City between 1856-60. This building may now be seen on the north east corner of Roy's addition on the street leading to the old cemetery. Its reputation since its removal has fallen into so low esteem that the neighborhood would gladly be rid of it. Squire Dorrington's barn, which so long occupied the lots

in the rear of Dorrington's brick block, near Mrs. Ralston's boarding house, was used as a hiding place for Brown's freemen. Many a time did the old barn do glorious service in this way, and the squire's noble wife, with true Christian heroism, gave them food to refresh their weary bodies and sympathy to cheer them on their way. Elias Meyers has recently put a windmill, one mile north of town, on the very spot where once stood the humble hut of one William Buchanan, poor in worldly goods but rich in love and sympathy for the wretched slaves whose treadmill of life was harder than his own. To him was intrusted the care of the first station on the underground railroad in Nebraska, and though he may have proved unfaithful to his trust in one or two instances, driven by hard necessity, yet upon the whole the blacks who roused him in the night received a kindly welcome and were sent on to Nemaha City, after resting awhile with him. Brown made four or five visits to Falls City, each time bringing slaves. He crossed the Nemaha near the falls and drove up through the town, making no effort to conceal the nature of his cargo. A mile or two beyond a camp would be selected. At nightfall the negroes would be hurried off to Buchanan's or Dorrington's barn, so that in case of an attack on the camp the negroes could escape. Strict watch was kept on his camp without the appearance of so doing. Brown himself would usually be found in town in close conversation with his friends. After two or three raids had been made into Missouri, the slaves along the border got it into their heads that "the year of jubilee" was at hand, and began to emigrate singly and in bands; of course these came unattended by white men. It is now nearly 27 years ago that a negro named Jim came secretly across the border one night to Brown's cabin and told that himself and family had been sold and would be sent off to Texas next day. Dividing his band into two parties Brown set off to the rescue. Several places were visited and the slaves taken; one Missourian who offered resistance was killed. This act roused Missouri against him. The governor of the state offered a reward of $2,500 for him, and President Buchanan added $250 more. Many of Brown's Kansas friends, through policy, now turned against him, and he knew that the time had come for him to strike the blow that he had planned to be the climax of all his efforts. So he began to move slowly through Kansas, pursued at times by pro-slavery parties, which were either eluded or defeated. When between Falls City

and Topeka, a short distance from the latter place, he captured squire Dorrington's mail carrier and brought him far enough back toward Nebraska, so that before any information could come to the knowledge of the U. S. authorities from this source he would be many miles on his way to Falls City, and pursuit would be useless. The mail carrier, now a resident of this city, was then an admirer and sympathizer of Brown. Finding that danger of persuit was over when he reached this place, he remained in the neighborhood two or three days. The last night was spent at the cabin of Buchanan in discussing with his friends—among whom Wilson M. Maddox was one—his Harper's Ferry campaign. It is reported that he camped one night at the place of John Herkendorf on the Muddy, and his negro women in cooking the meal broke a cup of Herkendorf's, which Brown insisted on paying for. In all his transactions with our people he was scrupulously honest. "Finding it necessary to his success that slaves should have horses, and that the masters should not," he never hesitated to take them from the Missourians. This is the last time Falls City saw John Brown, and she heard no more of him until the news flashed over the country on Oct. 17, 1859, that the U. S. arsenal at Harper's Ferry was in possession of an armed band whose professed object was to free the slaves. When asked by what authority they had taken possession of public property the reply was, "By the authority of God Almighty." Of the many thousands who heard the news on that morning, few understood what it really portended. The busy men of the north saw it merely as the wild adventure of a fanatic; to a little band of New Englanders it bore a different message. The south was bewildered, alarmed, and enraged; their homes and property no longer seemed secure. Virginia, wild with excitement, rushed to Harper's Ferry to look upon the man who had hurled the firebrand into their midst, the man who struck the first real blow at slavery, who had sounded the tocsin of civil strife and committed the first act of war. To quote Frederick Douglas, the most gifted orator of his race: "Not Carolina, but Virginia—not Major Anderson, but John Brown began the war that ended American slavery and made this a free republic. Until this blow was struck the prospect for freedom was dim, shadowy, and uncertain. The irrepressible conflict was one of words, votes, and compromises. When John Brown stretched forth his arm the sky was cleared, the time for compromising was gone, the

armed host of freedom stood face to face over the chasm of a broken union, and the clash of arms was at hand." Brown's own opinion of his work at the Ferry is best shown in his conversation with Mason, of Virginia, and Vallandingham, of Ohio, while in prison. "I claim to be here carrying out a measure I believe to be perfectly justifiable and not acting the part of an incendiary or ruffian; on the contrary I am here to aid those suffering under a great wrong. I wish to say furthermore that you had better, all you people of the south, prepare yourselves for the settlement of this question, it must come up for settlement sooner than you are prepared for it, and the sooner you commence that preparation the better for you. You may dispose of me very easily, I am nearly disposed of now, but this question is still to be settled—this negro question I mean. The end of this is not yet." It seems that every great cause must have its heroes and martyrs; "blood must be sprinkled in the faces of the people" before they recognize what eternal justice demands. The cause of slavery demanded at the hands of this nation the blood of John Brown, of Abraham Lincoln, and of many thousand good men besides. The one died on the scaffold, the death of a traitor to his country, than whom none loved her better, heartily condemned and hated by more than half the nation, and with but little sympathy expressed for him by the other portion; yet it was but a few years until the "Boys in Blue," around their evening camp fires and on the march, sang with a right good will,

> "John Brown's body lies mouldering in the grave,
> But his soul goes marching on."

Then his triumph was complete.