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John Brown and
Harper's Ferry

Continued from page 2

affair all confirmed the suspicions that in the British provinces to the north there was extensive plotting against the slavery system. In the report of the Senatorial investigation the proceedings at Chatham are declared to have had as their object "to subvert the government or more of the states, and to that extent the government of the United States." Question asked of the witnesses by the investigating committee which snowed that in the minds of the members of the committee there was a distinct Canadian end to the Harper's Ferry episode. Their suspicions may have been confirmed in their own minds by the fact that Dr. Samuel G. Howe, Frank B. Sanborn, George L. Stearns and Fred Douglass all fled to Canada immediately after the raid. They were known to be intimate with Brown.

In the carrying out of the raid at Harper's Ferry the actual assistance coming from Canada was comparatively small. Of the twenty-one men who marched out with Brown that October night of 1859 only one could in any way be described as a Canadian. This was Osborne Perry Anderson, a negro born free in Pennsylvania who while working as a printer in Chatham became connected with Brown and threw in his lot for the great adventure from which it was his fortune to escape. He is described by Hinton as "well educated, a man of natural dignity, modest, simple in character and manners." He wrote a pamphlet account of the raid, served during the latter part of the Civil War in the Union armies and died in Washington in 1871.

The question may naturally be asked: why was the aid given to John Brown by Canadian Negroes so meagre? That Brown himself had counted on considerable help in his enterprise from the men who joined with him in the Chatham convention is certain. John Edwin Cook, in his confession after Harper's Ferry raid, declared that "men and money had both been promised from Chatham and other parts of Canada." Yet, outside of Osborne P. Anderson, a negro, only one other Canadian seems to have had any share in the raid even indirectly. The exception was Dr. Alexander Milton Ross, the famous Canadian abolitionist, who, by agreement with Brown, went to Richmond, Va., before the blow was struck and was there when word came of its unhappy ending. What Ross was to do at Richmond in the event of any success attending Brown's plan is not clear, probably he was to keep watch on the official actions of the state.

The choice of Chatham as the place of meeting was not without special reference to the many Negroes in Canada. A majority of the Canadian Negroes were resident in the district now included in the counties of Kent and Essex of which Chatham was a center. Among these Negroes in this district were many men of intelligence, education and daring, some of them experienced in slave raids, and Brown was justified

in looking for help from among them. There is also evidence that among the Negroes there existed a sort of secret organization, known under various names, which had as its objects to assist fugitives and resist their masters. Help from this organization was also counted upon. Hinton says that Brown "never expected any more aid from them than that which would give a first impetus." John Brown himself is quoted by Pealf, one of his associates, as stating at Chatham that he expected all the free Negroes in the northern states to flock to his standard, that he expected the slaves in the south to do the same and believed that as many of the free Negroes in Canada as could do so would accompany him. This would appear to misstate Brown's plans. It was not numbers that he wanted but quality, a few men planted in the mountains of Virginia would have attained his objective perhaps better than a thousand.

The real reason why the Canadian Negroes failed to respond in the summer of 1859 when Brown's men were gathering in Virginia seems to be that too long delay ensued after the plans were laid at Chatham for aggressive action. The Chatham convention was held May 8—10, 1858, while the raid at Harper's Ferry did not take place until the night of October 16, 1859, nearly a year and a half later. Warlike ardor had cooled off in the meantime, the magnetism of Brown had been withdrawn and new engagements had been entered into. Had Brown been able to move at once from Chatham to Harper's Ferry there is no doubt but that he would have received substantial assistance from the Canadian Negroes. Frank B. Sanborn understood from Brown in April that he wanted to strike his blow about May 15, that is within a few days after the convention. The delay was caused by the exposure by Hugh Forbes to Senator Henry Wilson of Brown's plans and the panicky decision of Brown's white supporters in New England that those plans must be changed. Brown was full of regret and much discouraged by the assumed necessity of postponement, but, being penniless, he had to submit and accordingly went to Kansas.

There was some effort made at a later date to get the Canadian Negroes enlisted, the mission being in charge of John Brown, Jr., who also had some help from Rev. J. W. Loguen, the well-known Negro abolitionist. Together they visited Hamilton, St. Catharines, Chatham, London, Buxton and Windsor, helping also to organize branches of the League of Liberty among the Negroes. The letters of John Brown, Jr. show that the enthusiasm of May, 1858, had largely died out. There was a show of interest at Chatham but it did not go deep enough to bring men. "Canada, and the freed refugees therein, proved a broken reed," is the comment of one writer of the period, though against this should be placed some evidence which indicates that on account of the raid being carried out somewhat sooner than John Brown, Jr. anticipated there were a few Canadians on the way south when the end came. The proof of this lies in the papers of John Brown Jr. which were seized after the raid.

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