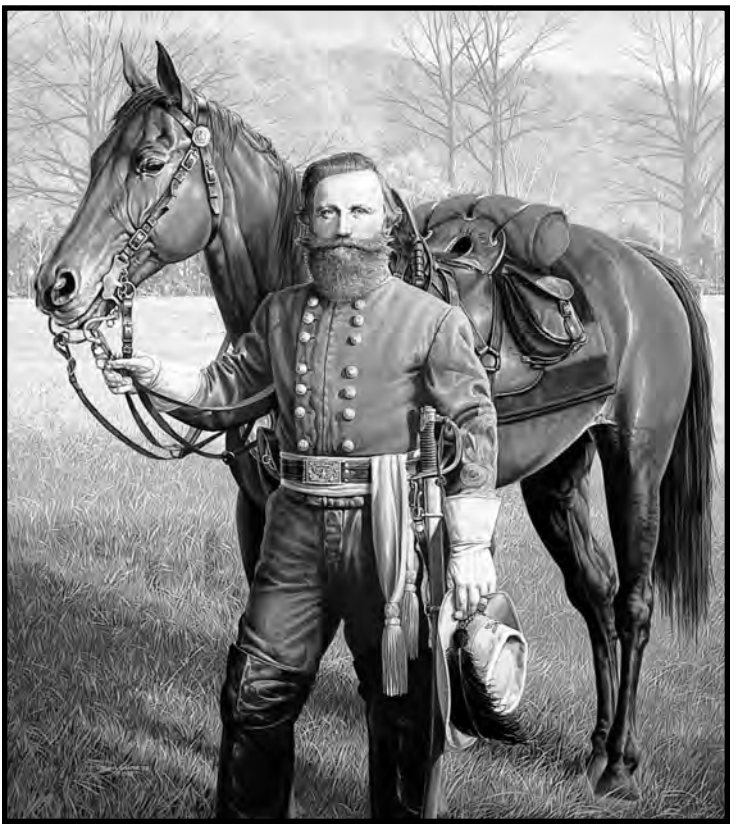
The Life of J. E. B. Stuart



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Special thanks are extended to Mr. James L. Marks for granting us permission to utilize the image of J. E. B. Stuart located on the front cover of this book, as well as on the title page. For information on the paintings available from Mr. Marks' gallery, you may write to:

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Preface

The Life of J. E. B. Stuart has been published in an effort to present the life of a honorable and courageous Christian to the American public. It is the firm belief of the publishers that truly great Americans are those who remain loyal to God and the United States Constitution.

Major General J. E. B. Stuart, who was justly called "the eyes and ears of Lee," was a powerful witness for Jesus Christ to countless soldiers who served in the War Between the States. General Robert E. Lee's order to the Confederate troops announcing the death of Stuart testifies to the impact that he had upon his fellow soldiers. Lee's order stated as follows:

> Among the gallant soldiers who have fallen in war, General Stuart was second to none in valor, in zeal, and in unflinching devotion to his country. To military capacity of a high order, he added the brighter graces of a pure life guided and sustained by the Christian's faith and hope. To his comrades in arms he has left the proud recollection of his deeds and the inspiring influence of his example.

It is my sincere hope that the inspiring example set by the life of General Stuart will stir each reader to make his own life a testimony of faith, love, and good works.

Michael J. McHugh
Arlington Heights, Illinois

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Introduction

Henry of Navarre[1] was a famous French king who led his forces to a glorious victory in a civil war. An English writer, Lord Macaulay,[2] wrote a stirring poem in which a French soldier is represented as describing this battle. Here is his picture of the great, beloved king:—

The King is come to marshal us, in all his armor drest,
And he has bound a snow-white plume upon his gallant crest.
He looked upon his people and a tear was in his eye,
He looked upon the traitors and his glance was stern and high;
Right graciously he smiled on us, as rolled from wing to wing,
Down all our line a deafening shout, 'God save our lord, the King!'

'And if my standard bearer fall—as fall full well he may,
For never saw I promise yet of such a bloody fray—
Press where you see my white plume shine amidst the ranks of war,
And be your oriflamme[3] today the helmet of Navarre.'

A thousand spurs are striking deep, a thousand spears in rest,
A thousand knights are pressing close behind the snow-white crest;
And in they burst and on they rushed, while like a guiding star,
Amidst the thickest carnage blazed the helmet of Navarre.

These lines about the French king of the sixteenth century are often quoted in describing a gallant cavalry leader of our own country. As we read them, we see the Confederate general, "Jeb" Stuart, his cavalry hat looped back on one side with a long black ostrich

1. King of France (1589–1610) who was the first of the House of Bourbon which ruled in France (1589–1792), Spain (1700–1931), and Naples (1735–1806, 1815–1860).

2. Thomas Babington Macaulay, 1st Baron (1800–1859), who was an English historian, author, and statesman.

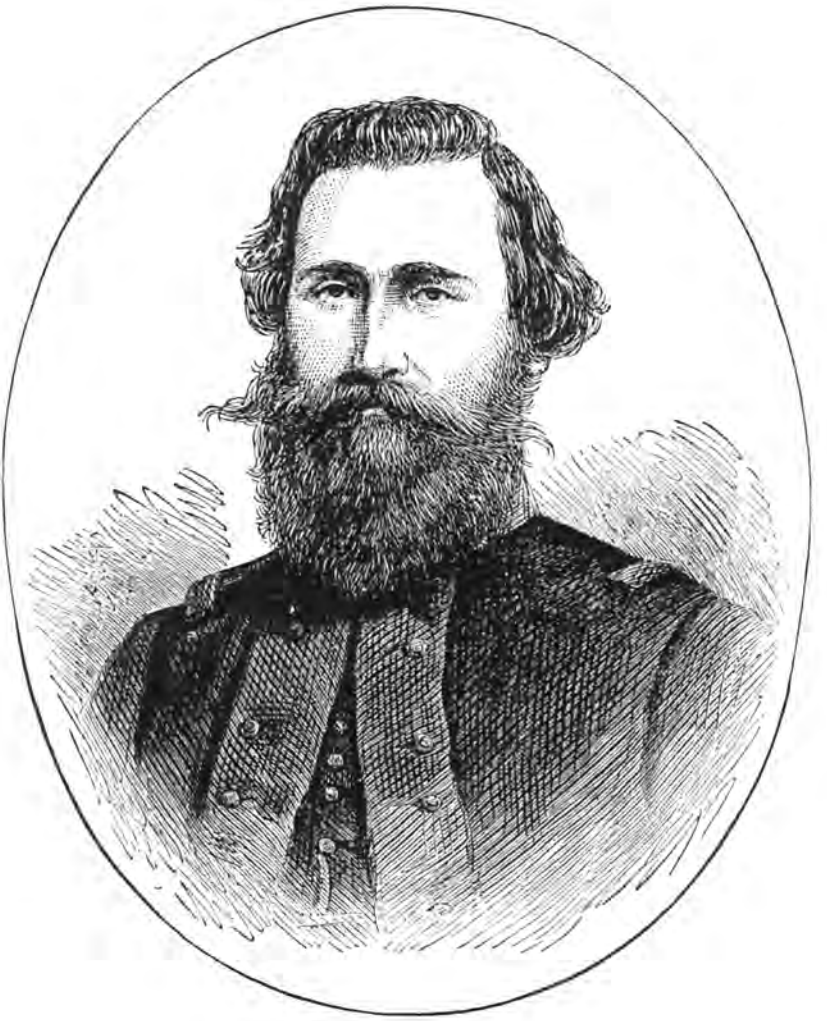
3. The ancient royal standard of France—a red, silk banner split at one end to form flamed-shaped streamers.

plume which his troopers always saw in the forefront of the charge. His men would follow that plume anywhere, at any time, and when you read this story of his life, you will not wonder that he inspired their absolute devotion.

Perhaps you have read about the lives of the fearless commander, General Robert E. Lee, and his great lieutenant, General Stonewall Jackson. If you study these men, you will learn something about the movements of the great body of an army, the infantry; but the infantry, even with such able commanders as Lee and Jackson, needed the aid of the cavalry and the artillery. It is with these two latter divisions of the army that we deal in studying the life of General Stuart. As chief of cavalry and commander of the famous Stuart Horse Artillery, he served as eyes and ears to the commanding generals. He kept them informed about the location and movements of the Federals, screened the location of the Confederate troops, felt the way, protected the flank and rear when the army was on the march, and made quick raids into the Federal territory or around their army to secure supplies and information as well as to mislead them concerning the proposed movements of Confederate forces. A heavy responsibility rested on the cavalry, and General Stuart and his men were engaged in many small but severe battles and skirmishes in which the army as a whole did not take part.

To horse, to horse! the sabers gleam,
High sounds our bugle call,
Combined by horror's sacred tie,
Our watchword, 'laws and liberty!'
Forward to do or die.

—Sir Walter Scott



Chapter 1

Youthful Days

1833–1854

James Ewell Brown Stuart, commonly known as "Jeb" Stuart from the first three initials of his name, was born in Patrick county, Virginia, February 6, 1833. On each side of his family, he could point to a line of ancestors who had served their country well in war and peace and from whom he inherited his high ideals of duty, patriotism, and religion.

He was of Scottish descent and his ancestors belonged to a clan of note in the history of Scotland. From Scotland a member of this clan went to Ireland.

About the year 1726, Jeb Stuart's great-great-grandfather, Archibald Stuart, fled from Londonderry, Ireland, to the wilds of Pennsylvania, in order to escape religious persecution.

Eleven years later, he removed from Pennsylvania to Augusta county, Virginia, where he became a large landholder. At Tinkling Spring Church, the graves of the immigrant and his wife may still be seen.

Archibald Stuart's second son, Alexander, joined the Continental army and fought with signal bravery during the whole of the War for American Independence. After the war, he practiced law. He showed his interest in education by becoming one of the founders of Liberty Hall, at Lexington, which afterwards became Washington College and has now grown into Washington and Lee University.

His youngest son who bore his name, was also a lawyer; he held positions of trust in his native State, Virginia, as well as in Illinois and Missouri where he held the responsible and honored position of a United States judge.

Our general's father, Archibald Stuart, the son of Judge Stuart, after a brief military career in the War of 1812, became a successful lawyer. His wit and eloquence soon won him distinction, and his district sent him as representative to the Congress of the United States where he served four years.

There is an interesting story told about General Stuart's mother's grandfather, William Letcher. He had enraged the Loyalists, or Tories, on the North Carolina border, by a defeat that he and a little company of volunteers had inflicted on them in the War for American Independence. One day in June, 1780, as Mrs. Letcher was alone at home with her baby girl, only six weeks old, a stranger, dressed as a hunter and carrying a gun in his hand, appeared at the door and asked for Letcher. While his wife was explaining that he would be at home in a short time, Letcher suddenly appeared and asked the man to be seated inside.

The latter, however, raised his gun, saying: "I arrest you in the name of the king."

When Letcher tried to seize his gun, the Tory fired and the patriot fell mortally wounded, in the presence of his young wife and babe.

Bethenia Letcher, the tiny fatherless babe, grew to womanhood and married David Pannill; and her daughter, Elizabeth Letcher Pannill, married Archibald Stuart, the father of our hero.

Mrs. Archibald Stuart inherited from her grandfather, William Letcher, a large estate in Patrick county. The place, commanding fine views of the Blue Ridge mountains, was called Laurel Hill, and here in a comfortable old mansion set amid a grove of oak trees, Jeb Stuart was born and spent the earlier years of his boyhood.

Mrs. Stuart was a great lover of flowers and surrounding the house was a beautiful old-fashioned flower garden, where Jeb, who loved flowers as much as his mother did, spent many happy days. He always loved this boyhood home and often thought of it during the hard and stirring years of war. Once near the close of the Civil

War, he told his brother that he would like nothing better, when the long struggle was at an end, than to go back to the old home and live a quiet, peaceful life.

When Jeb was fourteen years old, he was sent to school in Wytheville, and in 1848 he entered Emory and Henry College. Here, under the influence of a religious revival, he joined the Methodist church, but about ten years later he became a member of the Episcopal church of which his wife was a member.

Emory and Henry College During the Mid-1800s

Though always up and high-spirited, Stuart even as a boy possessed a deep religious sentiment which grew in strength as he grew in years and kept his heart pure and his hands clean through the many temptations that beset him in the freedom and crudeness of army life. A promise that he made his mother never to taste strong drink was kept faithfully to his death, and none of his soldiers ever heard him curse or swear even in the heat of battle. His gallantry, boldness, and joyful spirit, coupled with his high Christian virtues, caused all who came in contact with him not only to love but to respect and admire him.

He left Emory and Henry College in 1850 and entered the United States Military Academy at West Point where he had received an appointment.

At this time, Colonel Robert E. Lee was superintendent at West Point. Young Stuart spent many pleasant hours at the home of the superintendent where he was a great favorite with the ladies of the family. Custis Lee, the eldest son of Colonel Lee, was Stuart's best friend while he was a student at the Academy.

An interesting incident is told about Stuart while he was on a vacation from West Point. Mr. Benjamin B. Minor of Richmond, had a case to be tried at Williamsburg, and when he arrived at the hotel it was so crowded that he was put in an "omnibus" room, so called because it contained three double beds.

Late in the afternoon when the stage drove up, he saw three young cadets step from it and he soon found that they were to share with him the "omnibus" room.

He went to bed early, but put a lamp on the table by the head of his bed and got out his papers to go over his case. After awhile the three cadets came in laughing and singing, and soon they were all three piled into one bed where they continued to laugh and joke in uproarious spirits.

Finally one of them said, "See here, fellows, we have had our fun long enough and we are disturbing that gentleman over there; let us hush up and go to sleep."

"No need for that, boys," said Mr. Minor, "I have just finished."

Then as he tells us he 'pitched in' and had a good time with them.

The cadet who had shown such thoughtfulness and courtesy was young Jeb Stuart who as Mr. Minor discovered was one of his wife's cousins. He was very much pleased with the boy and invited him to come to Richmond. Stuart accepted the invitation and called several times at the Minor home.

He explained to Mr. Minor his plan for an invention which was to be called "Stuart's lightning horse-hitcher." This device was to be used in Indian raids. He excited Mr. Minor's admiration because he had such gallant and genial courtesy and professional pride. He

wanted even then to accomplish something useful and important for his country and himself.

General Fitzhugh Lee, who was at West Point with Stuart, and who later served under General Stuart as a trusted commander, tells us that as a cadet he was remarkable for "strict attention to military duties, and erect, soldierly bearing, an immediate and almost thankful acceptance of a challenge to fight any cadet who might in any way feel himself aggrieved, and a clear, metallic, ringing voice."

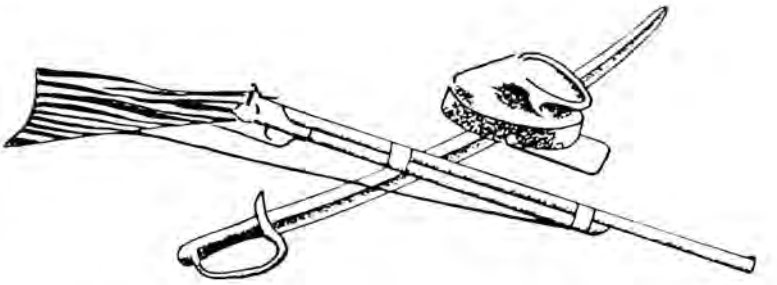
Although the boys called him a "Bible class man" and "Beauty Stuart," it was in good-natured boyish teasing; where he felt it to be intended differently or where his high standards of conduct seemed to be sneered at, he was able with his quick temper and superb physical strength to teach the offender a lesson.

As "Fitz" Lee tells us, Stuart was always ready to accept a challenge, but he did not fight without good cause, and his father, a fair-minded and intelligent man, approved of his son's course in these fisticuff encounters. Between his father and himself there was the best kind of comradeship and sympathy, and young Stuart was always ready to consult his father before taking any important step in life. The decision as to what he should do when he left West Point, however, was left up to him, and just after his graduation he wrote home that he had decided to enter the regular army instead of becoming a lawyer. He wrote:

> Each profession has its labors and rewards, and in making the selection I shall rely upon Him whose judgment cannot err, for it is not with the man that walketh to direct his steps.

Meanwhile, by his daring and skill in horsemanship, his diligence in his studies, and his ability to command, he had risen rapidly from the position of corporal to that of captain, and then to the rank of calvary sergeant which is the highest rank in that arm of service at West Point. He graduated thirteenth in a class of forty-six, and started his brief but brilliant military career well equipped with

youth, courage, skill, and a firm reliance on the love and wisdom of God.



Chapter 2

A Lieutenant in the United States Cavalry

1854 –1861

Most of Stuart's time from his graduation at West Point until the outbreak of the War of Secession was spent in military service along the southern and western borders of our country. During this period, there was almost constant warfare between Indians and frontier settlers. Stuart had many interesting adventures in helping to protect the settlers and to drive the Indians back into their own territory. The training that he received at this time helped to develop him into a great cavalry and artillery leader.

The autumn after he left West Point, Stuart was commissioned second lieutenant in a regiment of mounted riflemen on duty in western Texas. He reached Fort Clark in December, just in time to join an expedition against the Apache Indians who had been giving the settlers a great deal of trouble. The small force to which he was attached pushed boldly into the Indian country north of the Rio Grande.

Carrying the Gun Down the "Mule-path"

It was not long before the young officer's skill and determination received a severe test. The trail that the expedition followed led to the top of a steep and rug-

ged ridge which to the troopers' astonishment dropped abruptly two thousand feet to an extensive valley. The precipice formed of huge columns of vertical rock, at first seemed impassable, but they soon found a narrow and dangerous Indian trail—the kind that is called a "mule-path"—winding to the base of the mighty cliff. The officers and advance guard dismounted and led their horses down the steep path that scarcely afforded footing for a man and eventually set up a bivouac for the night. A little later, Lieutenant Stuart, with a rear guard of fifty rangers detailed to assist him, reached the top of the ridge, with their single piece of artillery. Stuart worked his way down the trail alone, hoping that when he reached the foot he would find that the major in charge of the expedition had left word that the gun was to be abandoned as it seemed impossible to carry it down the precipice. No such order awaited him, however, and the young officer determined to get the gun down in spite of all difficulties. He noted well the dangers of the way as he regained the top and, having had the mules unhitched and led down by some of the men, he unlimbered the gun and started the captain of the rangers and twenty-five men down with the limber.[1] He himself took charge of the gun and, with the help of the remaining men, lifted it over huge rocks and lowered it by lariat ropes over impassable places until it was finally brought safely to the valley below.

The major had taken it for granted that Stuart would leave the gun at the top of the precipice and was amazed when just at supper time it was brought safely into camp. Such ingenuity, grit, and determination were qualities which promised that the young officer would develop into a skillful and reliable leader

A few days later, the command encamped for the night in a narrow valley between high ridges. The camp fires were burning brightly and the cooks were preparing supper when a sudden violent gust of wind swept through the valley and scattering the fire set

1. A two-wheeled vehicle that was originally pulled by four to six horses or mules; behind it is towed a field gun or caisson (two-wheeled ammunition wagon).

the whole prairie into a moving flame. With such rapidity did the fire sweep over the camp that the men were unable to save anything except their horses, and in a deplorable condition the expedition was forced to return to the camp in Texas.

In May, 1855, Stuart was transferred to the First Regiment of cavalry, with the rank of second lieutenant. In July, this regiment was ordered to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and in September, it went on a raid, under the leadership of Colonel E. V. Sumner, against some Indians who had disturbed the white settlers. The Indians retreated to their mountain strongholds and the regiment returned to the fort without fighting.

While on this expedition, Stuart learned with deep distress of the death of his wise and affectionate father. It had been only a few weeks before that Mr. Stuart had written to approve his son's marriage to Miss Flora Cooke, daughter of Colonel Philip St. George Cooke who was commandant at Fort Riley. The marriage was celebrated at that place, November 14, 1855.

At this time, there was serious trouble in Kansas between the two political parties that were fighting to decide whether Kansas should become a free or a slave state. Stuart, who had been promoted to the rank of first lieutenant, was stationed at Fort Leavenworth in 1856-1857. Here he was involved in many skirmishes and local raids. It was at this time that he encountered the outlaw "Ossawatomie" Brown[2] of whom we shall talk about a little later.

Stuart passed uninjured through the Kansas contest, and in 1857 entered upon another Indian war against the Cheyenne warriors who were attacking the western settlers. In the chief battle of this campaign, the Indians were routed, but Lieutenant Stuart was wounded while rescuing a brother officer who was attacked by an Indian.

2. John Brown (1800–1859), also known as *Old Brown of Ossawatomie*, was an abolitionist—one who sought to destroy the institution of slavery, but ultimately strove to abolish the rights of the individual states in favor of a more centralized government.

Here is Stuart's own account of the fight as given in a letter to his wife, which she has kindly allowed us to copy:

> Very few of the company horses were fleet enough after the march, besides my own Brave Dan, to keep in reach of the Indians mounted on fresh ponies…. As long as Dan held out I was foremost, but after a chase of five miles he failed and I had to mount a private's horse and continue the pursuit.
>
> When I overtook the rear of the enemy again, I found Lomax in imminent danger from an Indian who was on foot and in the act of shooting him. I rushed to the rescue, and succeeded in firing at him in time, wounding him in his thigh. He fired at me in return with an Allen's revolver, but missed. My shots were now exhausted, and I called on some men approaching to rush up with their pistols and kill him. They rushed up, but fired without hitting.
>
> About this time I observed Stanley and McIntyre close by; the former said, "Wait, I'll fetch him," and dismounted from his horse so as to aim deliberately, but in dismounting, his pistol accidentally discharged the last load he had. He began, however, to snap the empty barrels at the Indian who was walking deliberately up to him with his revolver pointed.
>
> I could not stand that, but drawing my saber rushed on the Indian, inflicting a severe wound across his head, that I think would have severed any other man's, but simultaneous with ***that*** he fired his last barrel within a foot of me, the ball taking effect in the breast, but by the mercy of God glancing to the left and lodging so far inside that it cannot be felt. I rejoice to inform you that it is not regarded as at all fatal or dangerous, though I may be confined to my bed for weeks.

After this battle, all of the force pursued the Indians, except a small detachment under Captain Foote, which was left behind to guard the wounded for whom the surgeon established rough hospital quarters on the banks of a beautiful, winding creek. Here Stuart

Cheyenne Indians Preparing for a Raid

spent nearly a week confined to his cot, and as he wrote his wife at the time, the only books that he had to read during the long, weary days were his *Prayer Book*—which was not neglected—and his *Army Regulations.* A few pages of *Harper's Weekly* that someone happened to have were considered quite a treasure.

At the end of about ten days, some Pawnee guides who had been attached to the expedition brought orders for this little detachment to leave the camp where it was exposed to attacks from the wandering bands of Cheyenne Indians and go back to Fort Kearny a hundred miles away.

Stuart was just able to sit on his horse again, yet we shall see that in spite of his wound he was the life and salvation of the little party. The Pawnees said they were only four days away from the fort, but the second day these unreliable guides deserted and the soldiers were lost in a heavy fog—without a compass! They were forced to depend on a Cheyenne prisoner for information. After four days' fruitless and difficult marching through the forest, Stuart, who believed that the guard was willfully misleading them, volunteered to go ahead with a small force, find the fort, and send back help for those who were still suffering too seriously from their wounds to keep up on a rapid and uncertain march.

After many dangers and deep anxiety on his part, taking his course by the stars when the fog lifted at night and working his way through it as best he could by day, he finally reached Fort Kearny. The Pawnees had come in three days before, and scouting parties had been searching for Captain Foote's command about which much anxiety was felt. Help was immediately sent them, and as a result of Stuart's indomitable will and able services, the little party was rescued and brought safely to the fort.

From the autumn of 1857 until the summer of 1860, Stuart was stationed at Fort Riley. During these three years, there were few skirmishes with the Indians and Stuart had leisure to perfect the invention of a saber attachment that he had been thinking of ever since his student days at West Point. This invention was bought and patented by the government in October, 1859, while the inventor was on leave of absence in Virginia, visiting his mother and his friends.

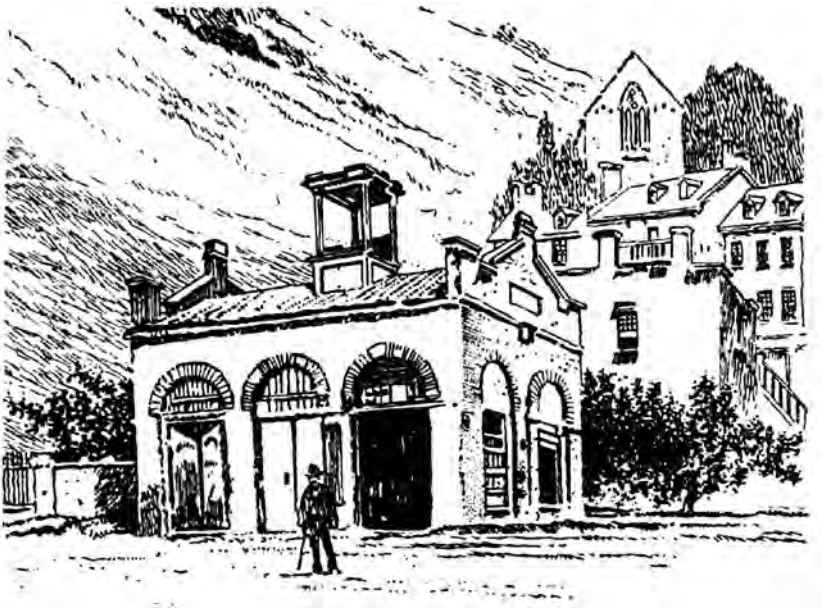
It was on the night of the sixteenth of this same October that a band of twenty men, under the leadership of John Brown, seized the United States arsenal at Harper's Ferry.

After seizing the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, he sent out his followers during the night to arrest certain citizens and to call to arms the slaves on the surrounding plantations. About sixty citizens were

arrested and imprisoned in the engine house, within the confines of the armory, but the slaves, either through fear or through distrust of Brown and his schemes, refused to obey his summons.

The next morning as soon as news of the seizure of Harper's Ferry spread over the country, armed men came against Brown from all directions. Before night he and his followers took refuge in the engine house, but it was so crowded that he was obliged to release all but ten of his prisoners.

When the news of Brown's raid was telegraphed to Washington, Lieutenant Stuart, who was at the capital attending to the sale of his patent saber attachment, was requested to bear a secret order to Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lee, his old superintendent at West Point, who was then at his home, Arlington, near Washington city. Stuart learned that Colonel Lee had been ordered to command the marines who were being sent to suppress the insurrection at Harper's Ferry, and he at once offered to act as aid-de-camp. Colo-



Arsenal at Harper's Ferry

nel Lee, who remembered Stuart well as a cadet, immediately accepted his offer of service.

Upon arriving at Harper's Ferry on the night of October 17, they found that John Brown and his men were still in the engine house, defying the citizen soldiers who surrounded the building. Colonel Lee proceeded to surround the engine house with the marines; at daylight, wishing to avoid bloodshed, he sent Lieutenant Stuart to demand the surrender of the fanatical men, promising to protect them from the fury of the citizens until he could give them up to the United States government.

When Lieutenant Stuart advanced to the parley, Brown, who had assumed the name of Smith, opened the door four or five inches only, placed his body against it, and held a loaded carbine in such a position that, as he stated afterward, he might have "wiped Stuart out like a mosquito." Immediately the young officer recognized in the so-called Smith the identical John, or "Ossawatomie," Brown who had caused so much trouble in Kansas. Brown refused Colonel Lee's terms and demanded permission to march out with his men and prisoners and proceed as far as the second tollgate. Here, he declared, he would free his prisoners and if Colonel Lee wished to pursue he would fight to the bitter end.

Stuart said that these terms could not be accepted and urged him to surrender at once. When Brown refused, Stuart waved his cap, the signal agreed upon, and the marines advanced, battered down the doors, and engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with the insurgents. Ten of Brown's men were killed by the marines and all the rest, including Brown himself, were wounded.

That same day, Lieutenant Stuart, under Colonel Lee's orders, went to a farm about four miles away that Brown had rented and brought back a number of weapons with which Brown had intended to arm the negroes. Colonel Lee was then ordered back to Washington and Stuart went with him. John Brown and seven of his men were tried, were found guilty of treason, and were hanged.

The John Brown Raid cast a great gloom over the country. While many people in the North regarded Brown as a martyr to the cause of emancipation, the southern people were justly indignant at the thought that their lives and property were no longer safe from the plots of the Abolition party which Brown had represented. The bitter feelings aroused by this affair culminated, in 1861, in the bloody War of Secession.