

CHAPTER IX.

HARPER'S FERRY.

Harper's Ferry was then a village of some five thousand inhabitants, lying on the Virginia side of the Potomac, and on either side of its principal tributary, the Shenandoah, which here enters it from the Southwest. Its site is a mere nest or cup among high, steep mountains; the passage of the united rivers through the Blue Ridge at this point having been pronounced by Thomas Jefferson a spectacle which one might well cross the Atlantic to witness and enjoy. Here the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad crosses the Potomac; and the rich valley of the Shenandoah is traversed for a considerable distance hence by the Winchester and Harper's Ferry Railroad. Washington is fifty-seven miles distant by turnpike; Baltimore, eighty miles by railroad. Modest as the village then was, space had been with difficulty found for its habitations, some of which were perched upon ground four hundred feet above the surface of the streams. One of its very few streets was entirely occupied by the work shops

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and offices of the National Armory, and had an iron railing across its entrance. In the old Arsenal building, there were usually stored from 100,000 to 200,000 stand of arms. The knowledge of this had doubtless determined the point of which the first blow of the liberators was to be struck.