

JOHN BROWN

MR. CHAIRMAN, AND FELLOW CITIZENS : I share the sympathy and sorrow which have brought us together. Gentlemen who have preceded me have well said that no wall of separation could here exist. This commanding event which has brought us together, eclipses all others which have occurred for a long time in our history, and I am very glad to see that this sudden interest in the hero of Harper's Ferry has provoked an extreme curiosity in all parts of the Republic, in regard to the details of his history. Every anecdote is eagerly sought, and I do not wonder that gentlemen find traits of relation readily between him and themselves. One finds a relation in the church, another in the profession, another in the place of his birth. He was happily a representative of the American Republic. Captain John Brown is a farmer, the fifth in descent from Peter Brown, who came to Plymouth in the *Mayflower*, in 1620. All the six have been farmers. His grandfather, of Simsbury, in Connecticut, was a captain in the Revolution. His father, largely interested as a raiser of stock, became a contractor to supply the army with beef, in the war of 1812, and our Captain John Brown, then a boy, with his father was present and witnessed the surrender of General Hull. He cherishes a great respect for his father, as a man of strong character, and his respect is probably just. For himself, he is so transparent that all men see him through. He is a man to make friends wherever on earth courage and integrity are esteemed, the rarest of heroes, a pure idealist, with no by-ends of his own. Many of you have seen him, and every one who has heard him speak has been impressed alike by his simple, artless goodness, joined with his sublime courage. He joins that perfect Puritan faith which brought his fifth ancestor to Plymouth Rock with his grandfather's ardour in the Revolution. He believes in two articles,—two instruments, shall I say?—the Golden Rule and the Declaration of Independence ; and he used this expression in conversation here concerning them," Better that a whole generation of men, women and children should pass away by a violent death, than that one word of either should be violated in this country." There is a Unionist,—there is a strict constructionist for you. He believes in the Union of the States, and he conceives that the only obstruction to the Union is Slavery, and for that reason, as a patriot, he works for its abolition. The Governor of Virginia has pronounced his eulogy in a manner that discredits the moderation of our timid parties. His own speeches to the court have interested the nation in him. What magnanimity, and what innocent pleading, as of childhood! You remember his words: "If I had interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or any of their friends, parents, wives, or children, it would all have been right. No man in this court would have thought it a crime. But I believe that to have interfered as I have done, for the despised poor, was not wrong, but right."

It is easy to see what a favorite he will be with history, which plays such pranks with temporary reputations. Nothing can resist the sympathy which all elevated minds must

feel with Brown, and through them the whole civilized world; and if he must suffer, he must drag official gentlemen into an immortality most undesirable, and of which they have already some disagreeable forebodings. Indeed, it is the *reductio ad absurdum* of Slavery, when the Governor of Virginia is forced to hang a man whom he declares to be a man of the most integrity, truthfulness and courage he has ever met. Is that the kind of man the gallows is built for? It were bold to affirm that there is within that broad Commonwealth, at this moment, another citizen as worthy to live, and as deserving of all public and private honour, as this poor prisoner.

But we are here to think of relief for the family of John Brown. To my eyes, that family looks very large and very needy of relief. It comprises his brave fellow-sufferers in the Charlestown Jail; the fugitives still hunted in the mountains of Virginia and Pennsylvania; the sympathizers with him in all the States ; and I may say, almost every man who loves the Golden Rule and the Declaration of Independence, like him, and who sees what a tiger's thirst threatens him in the malignity of public sentiment in the Slave States. It seems to me that a common feeling joins the people of Massachusetts with him. I said John Brown was an idealist. He believed in his ideas to that extent that he existed to put them all into action; he said, "he did not believe in moral suasion;—he believed in putting the thing through." He saw how deceptive the forms are. We fancy, in Massachusetts, that we are free; yet it seems the Government is quite unreliable. Great wealth, great population, men of talent in the Executive, on the bench,—all the forms right,—and yet, life and freedom are not safe. Why ? Because the judges rely on the forms, and do not, like John Brown, use their eyes to see the fact behind the forms.

They assume that the United States can protect its witness or its prisoner. And, in Massachusetts that is true, but the moment he is carried out of the bounds of Massachusetts, the United States, it is notorious, afford no protection at all; the Government, the judges, are an envenomed party, and give such protection as they give in Utah to honest citizens, or in Kansas; such protection as they gave to their own Commodore Paulding, when he was simple enough to mistake the formal instructions of his government for their real meaning. The state judges fear collision between their two allegiances; but there are worse evils than collision; namely, the doing substantial injustice. A good man will see that the use of a judge is to secure good government, and where the citizen's weal is imperilled by abuse of the Federal power, to use that arm which can secure it, viz., the local government. Had that been done on certain calamitous occasions, we should not have seen the honour of Massachusetts trailed in the dust, stained to all ages, once and again, by the ill-timed formalism of a venerable Bench. If judges cannot find law enough to maintain the sovereignty of the State, and to protect the life and freedom of every inhabitant not a criminal, it is idle to compliment them as learned and venerable. What avails their learning or veneration? At a pinch, they are no more use than idiots. After the mischance they wring their hands, but they

had better never have been born. A Vermont Judge Hutchinson, who has the Declaration of Independence in his heart ; a Wisconsin judge, who knows that laws are for the protection of citizens against kidnappers, is worth a court-house full of lawyers so idolatrous of forms as to let go the substance. Is any man in Massachusetts so simple as to believe that when a United States Court in Virginia, now, in its pre-sent reign of terror, sends to Connecticut, or New York, or Massachusetts, for a witness, it wants him for a witness ? No ; it wants him for a party ; it wants him for meat to slaughter and eat. And your habeas corpus is, in any way in which it has been, or, I fear, is likely to be used, a nuisance, and not a protection ; for it takes away his right reliance on himself, and the natural assistance of his friends and fellow citizens, by offering him a form which is a piece of paper.

But I am detaining the meeting on matters which others understand better. I hope, then, that, in administering relief to John Brown's family, we shall remember all those whom his fate concerns, all who are in sympathy with him, and not forget to aid him in the best way, by securing freedom and independence in Massachusetts.