

Boston Feby 26 -1878

Rev. O.B. Frothingham.

Dear Sir,

In your biography of Gerrit Smith, and also in your communication in the Herald of the 24th inst, you seem to insist that he either falsified outright, or grievously prevaricated in regard to his relations to John Brown and Harper's Ferry. Perhaps I can give you a little light, favorable to Mr. Smith, on a single point, viz, his complicity in the Manifesto – not Brown's plan of government– but the Manifesto, or plan for the Abolition of Slavery – that was published in the New York Herald and some other papers, just after Harper's Ferry. It was, naturally enough, assumed by the Herald and the Democratic Vigilance Committee, that this Manifesto had some connexion with Brown's scheme. And out of this assumption grew Smith's suit against that Committee. I was one of his counsel in that suit. And, if I were to see you, I could give you: in confidence, the most satisfactory evidence that the Manifesto had no connexion whatever with Brown's movement, and that neither Smith nor Brown knew any thing about it, until after it was printed, which was nearly a year, I think, before Harper's Ferry. When Brown saw it, or heard of it, he was sorry for it, lest it should put the slaveholders on their guard, and make his own enterprise more dangerous. For this reason the Manifesto was suppressed, so far as it could then be– not a great many copies of it had been issued– perhaps two hundred, or thereabouts; mostly among the slaveholders themselves. But immediately after Harper's Ferry, a holder of one of these copies– who had kept it as a curiosity, not knowing what it meant, sent it to the Herald, naturally supposing that it was a part of Brown's scheme. But it really had nothing to do with it. It was gotten up by one who knew nothing of Brown's scheme, until after the manifesto had been printed, and such copies of it issued. It was then suppressed, as I said, as far as it could be, in deference to the wishes of Brown, or at least some of Brown's friends.

I could tell you in confidence, still more about the matter, if you think it important. But I do not think proper to say more, or give any names, on paper, or for any one's ears but your own.

I have no motive to defend Mr. Smith against any just accusation. I sometimes quarreled with him, and reproached him, and was disgusted with him, for not doing more towards bringing the question of the Unconstitutionality of Slavery before the legal mind of the country, and having it settled without blood. His doing so little to that end, indicated, to my mind, either a sad lack of sense, on this part, or something worse. But I do not believe he would tell a lie.

I think there were very few who knew much about the details of Brown's scheme, until it was actually developed at Harper's Ferry. In fact, I think the scheme was, on the fact of it, so desperate, that it would have rec'd little assistance, if it had been fully known. And its desperate (1) was furnished to Brown more from a general confidence in him, and sympathy with him, than from any intimate knowledge of his plans.

The general destruction of papers that took place after Harper's Ferry, does not seem to me to prove so much as you think it does: because they could unquestionably be used as evidence, tending at least to prove that Smith knew more than he really did –

Yours respectfully, Lysander Spooner

P.S. The above statement about the manifesto may be only telling you what you already knew: if so, you will exempt it. But I have thought it might have some weight with you, as affecting Smith's veracity.

L.S.

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