

[VERY FADED]

Peterboro July 20th, 1860

Hon. John Cochrane -

My dear Sir

It pained me not a little that you are absent from the happy gathering and very greatly that sickness is the cause of it. I learned by your letter and afterwards by Ellen that one object of your intended visit to Peterboro was to present readers for my accepting a retraction from the Committee. You could doubtless present them in a very forcible[?] _____ per _____ manner, nevertheless, I am sure that they could just overcome my deep conviction that I have no moral right to accept it - the door for it was over thrown wide open. But as was _____ then _____ in my face. A strange return for what I thought would be _____ as a rare expression of generosity & magnanimity.

The Committee can never repair the deep and enduring wrong which their libel, never surpassed by any other in point of aggravation & enormity, has done me & mine. I speak not of the torturing effects upon my brain when reflected by the diseases of my body. I speak solely of its effects upon my reputation. When the public mind both North & South & especially South was in the very State to be most quickly & deeply & abidingly impressed against me, this Committee held me up, not only as a great plunderer and murderer, but as the great plunderer and murderer. I also had never so much as heard of the horrible association of which they speak, was in effect, held up as the author of it. I who so far as I can recollect had not thought nor heard of Harper's Ferry for years before the out-break and here last _____ was made conspicuously & largely responsible for that out-break. All this _____ notwithstanding my dread of violence and horror of bloodshed. -

Even my numerous friends and relatives in the South feared that what these thirty one men of wealth & high social _____, of wide fame & commanding influence said of me was true. I need not ass that the masses at the South; and even at the North fully believed it; Why should they not? Why should they regard these thirty one men as liars? Why should they for one moment think it possible that such men - men of cultivated and so honored should without the least ground of truth or justification, combine to crush an innocent man who stood not at all in their way and who had not party either in Church or State in which to _____ shelter or sympathy?

I doubt not that the _____ of my _____ wickedness created by the Committee is fast fading out of intelligent minds. The fact that the Committee when arraigned could show no evidence whatever of the

existence of their alleged Association; the fact that the Senate Committee, could find no such evidence, and the fact that this Senate Committee, although knowing my readiness to appear before them, did not send for me. Al[?] go to the _____ the intelligent of my innocence of the crimes[?] charged upon me by your thirty one neighbors, nevertheless will linger long in the masses - certainly too long for me to see the end of it. - Shall it forever from the South of course I am to the bedside of no dying friend. Then could I go and be safe from violence. Only three years ago I was _____ & honored in every Southern town that I visited. But now because of the effect of your thirty one neighbors to destroy men, I could not enter a Southern State without being exposed to the fury of mobs. Add this & much more than this to the agony which my family have suffered which I & my family have suffered as a consequence of these efforts & you too will see that the Committee can never repair the injury they have done ---

I do not know what will be the ultimate course if proceeding agreed upon by my _____ able lawyers. Their proceedings thus far may, I suppose, be regarded rather as preliminary & tentative and as _____ to bring to light the facts which will shape & deter _____ further proceedings. It seems probably now, that they will conclude to sue all the members of the Committee together. Whether they will couple the publishers with the Committee or sue them separately I do not know. I _____ suit against the whole Committee (should there be such a _____) my lawyers will claim a large amount of damages on account _____ my some small proportion to their vast wealth, & to their well - neighbor _____ crimes.

I propose to take no part in the litigation unless it be to address the Justices. My own _____ seem to be the proper ones for telling the juries what my hear had suffered, my reputation had suffered, and for _____ the _____ of justice on heads of the authors of all the sufferings.

You speak of the use of the names of the Committee as _____. The Committee have the _____ you at this point. Their payment of the publishers and several other things, besides permitting their names to stand for months in connection with the libel & to be doing all this time its crushing work upon me & mine will make it easy to prove that the use of their names _____ as it was was nevertheless fully[?] and emphatically authorized by them.

If the Committee have at last repented if at last they are blessed with a returning sense of justice, then will they be glad to have that done which will do most toward restoring to me the reputation they blasted. Glad of this would they be even tho' it should cost them half or even all their great wealth. Had I so cruelly injured my fellow man, I should think the redressing of the injury cheap, even though it were at the cost of my reduction to utter poverty.

For me to accept their retraction now after all that is past - after their insulting refusal of it when as yet they flattered themselves that they could find something against me, and that their Senate Committee could find something against me - would be to make myself as cheap & _____ as they sought to make me odious & infamous[?]. I said their Senate Committee for would that Committee have been raised had it not beed for the lying Manifesto put _____ by this Committee? No, if the Committee do at last sincerely desire to bring back to me as much as they can of the reputation they have taken from me, let them suffer verdicts of several hundred thousand dollars to be obtained against them. The news of such verdicts would arouse the _____ in every part of the land & would help much to persuade case numbers of my innocence. I readily admit that my pocket does not need verdicts either large or small. But I insist that my bleeding reputation need all the healing od even the largest verdicts.

Your Lester Ellen handed verdict with me on the subject of a settlement but that could not serve to _____ my reputation to the extent that verdicts would even though the Committee should pay me a sum equal to the probable aggregate of the verdicts against the, & the publishers. Nevertheless as it would be deemed unreasonable to refuse propositions for _____ and _____ on the one hand. I should not refuse an offer so large as to make the refusal of it vindictive & oppressive on their[?] part I would be careful on the other not to be guilty of frittering away _____ little of my former fair reputation the Committee may have left me by accepting an offer which in the light of the very great wealth of indeed many millions of the Committee and of _____ pecuniary impotence and of the _____ character of the little would be justly considered by the public tho[?] for a very sizable one.

I _____ my dear nephew that on regaining your health so far as to travel, you will confirm it by spending weeks with us.

Your affectionate Uncle-

Gerrit Smith