

Novr. 2—1859

Hon. Henry A. Wise
Governor of Virginia,

Sir,

Since the Harper's Ferry affair, a Circular (substantially like the two inclosed) of which I was the principal author, has found its way into the newspapers. And they have naturally enough inferred that there was some connexion between the Circular, and Brown's enterprise. But such was not the fact. And my fear that Brown's cause may be prejudiced by that inference induces me to make the following statement.

The Circular was gotten up about a year since, without any knowledge, on my part, that Brown's, or any other enterprise of that nature, was on foot. Soon after the Circular was printed, two men, having seen a copy of it, came to me and illuminated to me the existence of Brown's enterprise, and requested me to desist from sending the Circular to the South, on the ground that it would interfere with Brown's plans, by putting the slave holders on their guard. I afterwards conferred with others on the subject. They objected to the distribution of the Circular for the reason just given. The ground I took was, that no sudden inroad, by a few men, could be successful; that they would lose their lives, without doing any good; — that the slaves could not be induced to rise without much previous preparation of mind; that to insure the success of the invasion, it was indispensable to have the cooperation, to a considerable extent, of the non-slaveholding whites; and that to secure this co-operation would be the work of time. I urged that the invasion should therefore be postponed until the Circular could be distributed extensively over the South, and the slaves and non-slaveholding whites be prepared to welcome the invaders. My plan also was, as the Circular shows, that the matter should be discussed at the North, in the most public manner, until public sentiment should so far turn in our favor as to admit of our going to the South in such numbers as to insure an easy victory. In fact, I anticipated that if the plan should be publicly discussed, north and south, so large a portion of the public would be brought over to it, as that the slaveholders would see the hopelessness of resistance, and free their slaves to avoid a conflict, and save their other property; and that there would be no general insurrection or bloodshed.

I finally had an interview with Brown himself: who objected to the distribution of the Circular, for the same reasons as the others had done. From that time I desisted wholly from the distribution of it at the South. I did so because from the representations made to me, I had come to have some confidence that his enterprise (although I had little of its details) would have at least a measure of success, and I was unwilling to embarrass it.

I make this statement solely that Mr. Brown may not be held responsible in your mind for the Circular; and because I apprehend that the Circular may be considered more disrespectful, offensive, and insulting to the slaveholders personally, than Brown's enterprise itself, and thus tend to deprive him of the sympathy and mitigation of sentence, to which so brave and honorable a man is entitled.

I do not give you my name— but by showing one of the Circulars to Brown, and asking him what he knows about it, I have no doubt his statement will so far corroborate mine, as at once to convince you of its truth.

Permit me here to remind you of the legal principle, that there is no crime when there is no criminal intent. You have publicly acknowledged your conviction that Brown acted solely from his

conscience. How then can you consent to his death?

Yours respectfully,
The Author of the Circular [Spooner's handwriting]