

From Frederick Starr to Dear Father & All the Others

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Novem[.] 29th 1854--

Dear Father & all the others

Having mounted the platform I proceeded somewhat as follows. "I would have this audience clearly understand the manner in which I today appear before them. I am not here upon the summons of the 'Platte Co[.] self defensive association[.]'" I recognise no obligation as resting on any man to obey their commands. You will never see me here alive upon any command of theirs. I am here freely voluntarily today. Two distinguished men of this association Dr[.] Bayliss & John W[.] Vineyard invited me to come in order to clear my character. They say I am the only man who is thought to be an abolitionist in this community & they ask also that I give them my views in reference to this whole subject of Slavery. On invitation I am here[.] on compulsion never.

And yet it has been threatened for the last three weeks that Mr[.] Starr would be called out, it has been advised to put him on trial before this body, and therefore while I am not here by regular action for trial I am voluntarily here for that purpose. I come here an injured, misrepresented, belied man and as the men are here who considered me dangerous, let them be men, let them show their hands, let them tell here what act they have ever seen Mr[.] Starr perform which gave them either good or bad ground for pronouncing him an abolitionist, what word has he ever spoken[.] what syllable has he written on which you say that he is an abolitionist--and if you have not seen or heard, these what do others say--what are the rumors, why assassinate a man in the dark[.] I shall not go further until I know the charges, any man[.] every man, friend or foe, either in friendship or in hate, be men & give me the charges."

On this with a good natured smile, I [MS. illegible] the hip joint of one leg, resting on the other, pulled out a 6 inch plug of liquorice, & a huge jack knife & cut off a piece with great deliberation & then inserted it into the oral cavity. After some two [minutes?], the President got up. "I" said he "have often heard it said

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that Mr[.] Starr was an abolitionist. I do not know what reason they had for their opinions. I never paid much attention to the reports. as for myself, I do not know any thing which should make men think so. The president sat down.

I thanked Judge Galloway for his speech, but told the audience that there were no charges there, and reiterated the call "bring on your charges."

Dr. Bayliss arose. "He had known Mr[.] Starr for some time. When he first came to the country Mr. Starr did him the honor to call upon him at his residence; where Mr. S[.] introduced the subject of slavery himself: and where we had a long talk upon the subject for some three hours[.] from which conversation he was impressed that Mr. Starr's views of slavery were moderate and judicious and that he was sure Mr. S[.] was far from being an abolitionist, and that he had always expressed himself that Mr. S[.] had basely deceived him or he was no abolitionist. Dr. B[.] sat down.

I thanked Dr. B[.] for this speech[.] assured him that his understanding & impression from our conversation was correct. But gentlemen the man with whom I talked more fully than any man in the state says he has opposed & denied the truth of the rumors. But I have nothing as yet to explain, "bring on the charges[.]"

At this point Gen[.] Stringfellow arose and in his deep heavy growl addressed the chair thus, "I did not know that Mr[.] Starr was here on trial. If he was on trial it should be under different circumstances than these, not before a promiscuous audience & with open doors. If Mr. Starr has a

speech to make why let him go on but a trial is not now the order of the association.

I thanked him for his interruption & replied that when men wished a trial and had not the nerve to command it, that it became them as men, when the accused was willing for an investigation to come out fairly & make the investigation thorough & told him further that if they would give me the text I would preach the sermon.

Mr. Vineyard at last arose and said "I have had

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a long talk with Mr. Starr some days ago and the things I shall mention we have talked over before. Now there are certain rumors that I will state as Mr. Starr calls for them. First is said that he taught a school of negroes here some two years ago.

Second[,] He went to Mr. Bland and told him that he ought to let his boy Henry go free[,] that he was too smart to be a slave.

Third[,] that He had told Mr. Risk the same about his slaves.

Fourth[,] On the 4th of july He rode in his buggy with a negro who carried his umberella, and thus he had insulted the ladies & gentlemen of Weston.

I thanked Mr. Vineyard for having come to my relief & called on any other man to bring on charges as I wished to hear all before I commenced my reply. I waited in vain[.] I then began with the explanations of all these grave charges. I told them that Mr. Hulse in a conversation with me had intimated that he should sometime free his slaves. As George was the oldest boy among them and the one who would have to look after the family if emancipated, I thought that if Mr. Hulses philanthropy would give him his freedom, that my philanthropy would help to prepare him to appreciate & enjoy & improve that freedom. That I offered if George wished it & Mr. Hulse was willing to teach George to read. Mr[.] Hulse was glad to have me do so & George came two or three times a week to learn to read. the slaves at Mrs Warners where George lived wished to come, and with the permission of their master they came. Another man belonging to Hon[.] L.D. Bird wished to come. he obtained his written consent. I met Mr[.] Bird, & enquired whether there was any objection to what I was doing, he said he had looked at the law and permission was given. Another man[,] Henry Bland[,] wished to come & brought permission. One of Barbee's girls left and one purchased by Mr. Warner took her place. This school of

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six slaves continued about six months, when there was some disturbance attempted through the papers and by the advice of friends it was discontinued. My desire was to enable one man if he should ever get his freedom to become respectable & useful. Others wished to come. My desire for them was to enable each to read the holy bible [*text stricken through*] for himself. Now this desire does not dwell with me alone[.] all over the United States Christian masters & mistresses have taught and are teaching their slaves to read the scriptures. I will read a few lines from one of the highest authorities in the United States. Dr. Thornwell is the President of the University of South Carolina[,] elected to that position by the Legislature of that state[,] an intimate friend & counsellor of Hon[.] John C[.] Calhoun. Now in a great sermon in the city of Charleston upon this very subject and to the [MS. illegible] of slaveholders uses this language.

"In the different systems of slavery, taken collectively, all the essential rights of humanity have been recognized by law--showing that there is nothing in the relation itself, inconsistent with this legal protection, the right to acquire knowledge--which is practically admitted by us, though legally denied, was fully recognized by the Romans, whose slaves were often the teachers of their children and the scholars of the commonwealth. The right of the family was formally protected among the Spaniards: and the right to personal safety is largely protested among ourselves. But without stopping to inquire in

what way temporal legislation may, most effectually, protect the rights of the slave, we hesitate not to affirm, that one of the highest and most solemn obligations which rests upon the masters of the South, is to give to their servants, to the utmost extent of their ability, free access to the instructions & institution of the gospel. The injustice of denying to them food and raiment, & shelter, against which the law effectually guards[,] is nothing to the injustice of defrauding them of that bread which cometh down from Heaven."

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