

PATRICK HENRY [Matthew Livingston Davis] to MVB, 7 October 1834

LETTER XIII.

Albany

Oct. 10th, 1834.

Sir-

Before I proceed to further details on the subject of your supporting Mr. King as the acknowledged leader of the opposition on the Missouri question, it may not be improper to notice the miserable subterfuge to which some of your friends (through your advice) may attempt to resort. It has been remarked, in the course of these letters, that on all great national measures, your policy, as far as practicable, was *non-committal*. It has been shown, that while you pretended not to be opposed to the war, you endeavored to destroy, politically, its advocates, and to elevate on their ruins the peace party.

So on the Missouri question: while you halted, and doubted, and distrusted, what ought to be done, your zeal in favor of the election of Mr. King was untiring; and he was known to be inflexible on this point. I am not uninformed, that as a cover, you addressed that gentleman, *advising* him to be temperate, &c. in his opposition. I know not which to wonder at most, your presumption, or your duplicity. Sir, you knew that your advice would have no influence. You supported Mr. King without any expectation that he would change his policy. The circumstance of your advising him how to act is now referred to for the purpose of reminding you, that not only your movements, but your motives, on this occasion are well understood.

In January, 1819, a paper under your influence remarked—"If a federal gentleman is appointed to the Senate, let other states in the union be satisfied that the administration of this state *is under federal influence*." I am warranted in making the assertion, because I know the fact, that this remark, if not specially authorised by you, met your approbation. Such was your language at the commencement of the

year, and yet in a few months after, you was ardent in your support of a federalist. Is it not evident, then, according to your own showing, that "other states in the union should be satisfied *that you was under federal influence?* The conclusion is irresistible, and that mind must be very obtuse that can entertain a doubt. Such was the fact.

During the summer of 1819, a puerile abortion in the form of a pamphlet, recommending the appointment of Mr. King, made its appearance under the title of "*Considerations,*" &c. This pamphlet was said to be the joint production of the Hon. Martin Van Buren and the Hon. Benjamin F. Butler, Attorney General of the United States. It was stillborn; and passed unheeded, except when its nurses attempted to call it into notice. Some doubts were, therefore, expressed whether you was or was not the author; and as it attracted but little attention, your claim to the honor of writing it was not urged. But, Sir, I know that you was the author. It is a fair specimen of your talents as a writer.

In the autumn of 1819, you addressed a letter to one of your friends, which letter is now before me, and from which I make the following extract:-"I should regret to find any flagging on the subject of Mr. King. *We are committed to his support. It is both wise and honest, and we must have no fluttering in our course. Mr. King's views toward us are honorable and correct. The Missouri question conceals, so far as he is concerned, no plot, and we shall give it a true direction. You know what the feelings and views of our friends were when I saw you; and you know what we then concluded to do. My "Considerations," &c. and the aspect of the Argus, will show you that we have entered on the work in earnest. We cannot, therefore, look back. Let us not, therefore, have any halting. I will put my head on its propriety,*"

Now, Sir, compare this extract from your own letter, with the language held a few weeks previous. It is a text which would seem to justify extensive commentaries. It is not written with your accustomed caution. It shall, however, be but briefly noticed.

And first, Sir, permit me to ask what is meant by the sentence "*We are committed to his support?*" Does it, or does it not, mean that "*We*" have made a bargain or an arrangement, or a pledge, to support Mr. King? If it does not mean this, what does it mean? And who are "*we?*" Who is it that was authorized during the summer of 1819, to negotiate and transfer any portion of the democratic party to the federalists? Who were the high contracting parties which thus, through your agency, "*committed us to the support of Mr. King?*" What were the terms and conditions upon which we

were committed? What the *quid pro quo*? And who was to receive it? Have not the people a right to demand, even at this late day, the names of those who had the audacity to commit their representatives to the support of a federalist, as a Senator of the United States? Where was your abhorrence of *bargains* when you were thus “committed to the support of Mr. King?”

Again. *It is both wise and honest.*” Was it *wise* to place a political opponent, of great and commanding talents in the Senate for *six* years? Was it *honest* to make this committal after denouncing Mr. Clinton and his friends as corrupt and profligate, on the mere *suspicion* that they would support him? It is only necessary to present the case to a thinking man, and he will be satisfied that it is indefensible.

“*Mr. King’s views towards us are honorable and correct.*” Did Mr. King, in explaining his views, or in the progress of the negotiation, authorize you, sir, to say that he would abandon one tittle of his political creed? Did he pledge himself to sustain the democracy of the country? In what particular were his views (politically) correct? Who are “us?”

“*The Missouri question conceals, so far as he is concerned, no plot, and we shall give it a true direction.*” I am free to acknowledge, sir, that this sentence embarrasses me, that I feel myself incapable of presenting a satisfactory explanation of its meaning. May I be permitted to rely on your well known frankness for the *key*? It can be furnished through one of your supple organs, or shall I appeal to Mr. *Buel*, the then restive editor of the Albany Argus? Absolve him from all pledges and promises to keep secret your arrangements on this and other subjects, and to him I will surrender the pen; to him I will leave the completion of your history-the filling up of the sketch which I have thus far hastily drawn. This subject shall be renewed, however, in my next letter, if not satisfactorily explained through some other channel.

PATRICK HENRY.

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