

PATRICK HENRY [Matthew Livingston Davis] to MVB, 19 October 1834

LETTER XV.

Albany

Oct. 19th, 1834.

Sir.-

I have now briefly reviewed your political career, from 1812 to 1820 inclusive. During this period you was a member of the state Senate. It will be observed, that reference has only been made to the most prominent of your acts. Your petty and local intrigues have been passed by unheeded. They evince, however, a heartless insincerity, under the effect of which many of your adherents have lamented, in private, that ever their political destiny was connected with yours. In this particular you are certainly a most extraordinary man. You appear to be incapable of a disinterested act of friendship; and if ever you have performed one, which required from you any sacrifice, I solemnly declare, before high Heaven, it has not come to my knowledge; and yet, no man living knows you better than the writer of these letters. From 1812 to the present day, he has marked your course. He has studied your character. He has communed with your most intimate and devoted adherents. Beholding, at times, your sudden, and to the vulgar gaze, unaccountable evolutions, he has inquired into causes and motives. The result of these inquiries has been uniformly the same. They have ever terminated in demonstrating that some mercenary or selfish consideration, present or anticipated, was the moving principle.

I repeat, sir, in this particular you are a most extraordinary man. Thus operated upon, you have a plausibility of manners-an apparent condescension of demeanor, well calculated to make a favorable impression upon those whom you wish to use, or whose power and influence you apprehend. With a temper naturally violent, you have great self-command. If I may be allowed the phrase, you are pre-eminently self-disciplined. You have another advantage; the impetuosity of your temperament is always restrained within the limits of discretion. Cold and calculating, you rarely

act under the influence of excitement. Mankind has been your study. You are quick in your perceptions, cunning in your devices, and adroit in your movements. With unbounded ambition, you possess a quality that few of your compeers can boast. You are not one of those that strive to pluck the fruit before it is ripe. You do not urge your claims or pretensions to office, until you feel that the public mind is as well prepared for your reception as it probably ever will be; and therefore it is, that I am confident you consider the present struggle as (with you) the struggle for political life or death.

Thus qualified, and thus circumstanced, you will make a mighty effort for the ascendancy. You will be lavish in your promises. In your social intercourse, pliant and supple, when necessary; but supercilious towards your underlings and dependents. Wo, wo, however, to him that confides in your patriotism or disinterested kindness, for he shall reap the whirlwind of disappointment. No man has ever yet retained your friendship or patronage after his power to *serve* or to *injure* you had ceased. Am I to be asked, how is it that you have your supporters? how is it that individuals are found so devoted to the promotion of your wishes and your views? As a general reply, I might cast back the interrogatory-*Who are they?* but I will not, because I know among them a few honorable, patriotic, and good men. Men who have yet to learn your real character. It is admitted, however, that you pay your efficient mercenaries so far as "the spoils of victory" are concerned. If they are sycophantic and useful, (and you possess power,) while they remain so they will be bountifully supplied from the public *crib*. This your partizans understand, and understanding it, govern themselves accordingly.

That demagogues, in every age and every country, by such means, have obtained stations of honour and emolument, is well known. The pages of history abound with such instances. It is useless to refer to them. Within our own day, and our own experience, to how many examples can we point? It is true, very few have been so successful as the Hon. Martin Van Buren. The preceding remarks may, perhaps, be deemed a digression; if so, they will be pardoned, it is hoped, when it is recollected that but little latitude has been given in these letters, to declamation or denunciation. They have been confined, in a great measure, to matters of fact and detail.

I have heretofore remarked, that a part of your policy has been to keep under your control certain newspaper presses, for the purpose of manufacturing "*public opinion*." The Albany Argus, at an early period, was in your hands. It is believed,

however, that you never had so obsequious an agent, in that establishment, as at this time. I am tolerably well acquainted with the various transfers it has undergone, and in some instances could explain the *reasons*; but that is not now necessary, and perhaps would be deemed mal-apropos. I will, however, so far lift the curtain as, to let Mr. *Jesse Buel* have a peep behind it, that he may appreciate your kindness in 1819, and in doing so, will establish your connection, at that time, with the Albany Argus.

You may have forgotten, and therefore I will remind you of the fact, that about the middle of December 1819, you attended a Circuit Court in Hudson.— You had on hand two intrigues of no trifling importance. The first was, to effect, when the Legislature met, a nomination of *Daniel D. Tompkins* (then Vice President,) for the office of Governor, in opposition to *De Witt Clinton*. The second was, to secure the re-election of the Hon. *Rufus King* to the Senate of the U. States, and thus defeat the admission of *Missouri*, as a new State, into the Union. While at Hudson, you addressed a letter to one of your friends, which letter is now before me, and from which I make the following extract:

*"I have been much embarrassed in the affair with Mr. Buel by an evident apprehension, on his part, that I want to get rid of him. When I return to Albany, I will explain to you," &c. &c.*

Now, sir, this not only proves your connection with the Argus, but it does more; it proves, if your assertions are to be believed, that Mr. *Buel* was alarmed at the idea of your turning him out of the establishment; or, in your own words, "that you wanted to get rid of him." And how was you "to get rid of him," if he was not as a mere piece of dough in your hands, to be moulded, as best suited your purposes? It is evident, from your representations, that you held the power "to get rid of him," or he would not have felt the alarm you represent. I will not pursue this subject, because I have no wish to harrow up the feelings of Mr. *Buel*, by recalling to his recollection the mortifying if not degraded situation, in which you was privately placing him, before your correspondents.

PATRICK HENRY.

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