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1-10-1830

Letter from Josiah Johnston to George Sibley, January 10, 1830

Josiah Stoddard Johnston
Washington D.C.

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(George C. Sibley)

J. S. Johnston

Washington Jan^y 10th-1830

My dear Sir

I have rec^d. your two letters- & It will give me great pleasure to comply as far as I can with all you require- My time is much occupied, so that I have but little time to devote to my friends- attending two committees, sitting 4 hours a day in the Senate- attention to private claims before Congress & in the public offices- Correspondence on necessary business- leaves me but little leisure even to prepare for the debates- I am obliged to regret that this business deprives me the means of appearing as often or as well as I ought on questions of great public interest & of corresponding with my political & personal friends- It will give me pleasure to write you occasionally, & to send you the papers & public documents- The newspapers almost supersede the necessity of correspondence on political matters- They treat of every subject, & give you all the rumours and some of the Scandal of the political world- In fact little is known here except what is found in the papers or reflections made on what is known. The party of General Jackson is very strong, if it can be held together, & this is the great object- The interests are very different both personal & political- Political principles & personal ambition bring them into direct collision, but as yet there is no separation. The friends of the President & those in office desire him to remain another term- While the friends V. Buren, who expect the succession desire he will retire- They cannot wait 8 years & he might not be able to indure the Labor of his office & a thousand things might intervene- If the General retires- the place is then open to the ambitions of all aspirants & the parties will then separate- In this state of things it is impossible to say what may occur- We are unbroken & undivided- & we shall adhere under all Circumstances to Mr. Clay-

The Admⁿ. have gained nothing in public opinion- His Tarif doctrines (the counterpart of it)- the distribution of the public money- & the National Bank must be very offensive to the South- while Proscription is odious- & the appt. of E----(?) a bad man as a reward of political service is greatly reprehended.

This system of removals & the doctrine of rotation has changed the character of the Government- it remains to be seen whether it can be restored / correct principles- We shall labor to preserve the Government, & guard against the introduction of bad practices & bad principles-

Mr. Clay will no doubt carry the west if the General is withdrawn- They will certainly prefer him to any other man- & if the General holds on it will weaken his force very much- he is considered by many as under a pledge- at least an implied promise to retire-

I hope you have a just estimate of public life- the glare of it may deceive, but there is nothing in it worth the struggle- You ought to be much happier & I have no doubt you have Phylosophy enough to know that you are, on your new farm- The good & ill of life in almost any condition is nearly ballanced- but almost all are a little dissatisfied with their own- The great secret of happiness is to be content with ones lot, all improve their condition few can change their destiny- Those who take a public Course have as many disappointments-mortifications & vexations as any other, perhaps more, & more bitter and Corroding. If I was again at home & a private citizen, I would consult my own happiness in personal independence, leisure & domestic employment- but as it is I must follow on my course & fulfill my

destiny, whatever it may be- We are fascinated with public life we know not why except we know it is a diversion- & an agreeable one- It is perhaps, partly owing to the preconceived opinions we have of it when seen a distance- The elevation of the Station which turns all eyes upon us- the dignity of the questions & the influence upon the happiness of so many people, that gives importance to all we say or do (?)- But if we have the means of being happy at home, we shall not add to it much by changing it, for what we shall find here. After all, how much it costs to get here- how many are utterly disappointed when they obtain the object of their ambition & how much is suffered by those that fail in it- One of the evils of it is that it disqualified for all other pursuits-

Mr. Bates was a very intelligent man & able representative & would have done great honor to his State- He was very highly appreciated here & when the present fever goes off will be at home-

As soon as the General determines on his Course, whether to continue or retire- you may see new questions & new interests spring up- perhaps a new state of things may present themselves-

My son William is a very fine boy- In his disposition he is very amiable & affectionate. His constitution is perfectly sound & he enjoys good health & grows apace- He is capable of learning anything with great facility- & has made great progress- He is one of the best scholars in Latin, Greek, French & Mathematics- & might have entered at Cambridge last September. He will probably enter next Summer, but about the propriety of that we are debating- & he may enter if we please the second year- I prefer to learn more of the modern Languages & not enter until Sixteen. But he is anxious to go with the class. He will have to make his way in the world, & it seems to be an irrevocable decree, that none shall succeed but those who have to make their own way- The labor, discipline, trials, & are necessary to give force to character- to perform the higher duties of Life- We make a great Sacrifice, but a necessary one parting with him- Mrs. Johnston continues to enjoy good health & look young, desires her kind regards to yourself & Mrs. Sibley- she will write Mrs. H. Sibley so as to meet her on her return-

My remembrance & regard to Mrs. Sibley & my best wishes for your health & happiness

J. S. Johnston