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Letter from George Sibley to James H. Birch, September 20, 1827

George Champlin Sibley

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ready writer:

FORT OSAGE, SEPT. 20, 1827.

To Mr James H Birch.

Editor of the Western Monitor, &c }

Sir—Your note to me dated the 1st inst. came to hand on the 7th, and should have been acknowledged immediately, but for indisposition and the press of other business. I regret, sir, that it does not accord with my views and settled opinions as relates to the politics of the day, to patronise, by any feeble aid of mine, the paper you have commenced publishing at Fayette, of which I have seen and looked over the two first numbers. We backwoods clodhoppers want *correct* information, sir, upon matters of public concern; and more especially in relation to the great party dispute that seems to pervade the Union as to measures and men. &c. Very few of us can have any other interest in this dispute than to qualify ourselves to vote at the polls, for those men who may be more likely to serve us faithfully, according to the well established principles of the constitutional laws of the land. And as we cannot possess much personal knowledge of those citizens who are seeking our suffrages for the high places under the general government particularly; we are happy to have it sometimes in our power to obtain such knowledge from the public journals. But if those journals limit themselves entirely to *one side* of a great question, instead of laying the whole matter fairly and impartially before us, we find, sooner or later, that our money and our time have been expended, not in the attainment of any useful knowledge, but that we have squandered them for our own deception.

Editors of public journals have it in their power, (from their interchange with each other,) to collect a great mass of facts touching the events of the day; and it may be fairly presumed that if their readers are left in the dark, upon subjects of great national concern, it is not because their instructor, their *monitor*, is unable to enlighten them; but because he chooses rather to keep them in darkness, and to mislead them. It is thus, sir, that the *press*, that boasted palladium of our liberties, is capable of being converted into an engine for mere party purposes; an instrument by which a few may govern the many; by which the people may sometimes be deluded and made the tools of their own degradation.

In the first column of the first page of the first number of your "Monitor," and immediately following your declaration addressed to your patrons, that "error shall never be voluntary or intentional," and that "pure republican principles" shall be the rule of your conduct, you have laid before your "patrons" an article from the "Missouri Observer," which contains many unfair and false insinuations and assertions of the present executive government of the Union—need I point out to you, sir, *our monitor*, these errors?—I presume not; your researches for truth must have been very limited or very unsuccessful, if from the mass of authentic documents in your possession, and which you have imposed upon yourself the duty carefully to examine, you have not yet discovered the improper tendency that the dissemination of that article must have upon the minds of such a remote community as ours is, who depend principally on the local newspapers for information upon all such subjects. Being myself a little more fortunate than my neighbors in possessing better means of information, which I do not neglect to avail myself of, I confess I was astonished to find such an article at the very head of your first *monitor* issue to the people, which you request me to distribute. As I am absolutely obliged to decline that task (except in so far as my duty as postmaster is concerned,) I have enclosed it to you.

thus candidly to state to you my reasons. In common with my fellow clothhoppers, I feel not the least desire to yoke myself to the car of any of the distinguished men whose pretensions for the most exalted station on earth, as set forth by their several partizans. Without any wish to assail or to eulogise either of them, I mean to exercise (understandingly I hope) the sacred duty of a freeman, in bestowing my suffrage. And I regret again, sir, that from all present appearances, I should look in vain in your columns for any light to guide my choice.

I am, sir, with due respect, your obedient servant

G. C. SIBLEY.