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Title: Letters from James Buchanan to James Webb

Date: March 30 - December 7, 1855

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Strictly Confidential.

Legation of the United States,

London 30 March 1855.

My dear Sir,

I observe you are down upon the
St. Domingo Conference "like a hundred of brick". This I did
not expect after what had passed between us; but no
matter.

In case of failure to purchase Cuba, - what ought
to be our future course? On re-perusing the suggestions of
the Conference, I find nothing which I should desire to
change. We could there only interfere by force, in a case of
self preservation so clearly made out as to be consistent
with our past history & manifestly justified by the great &
imperative law. It is true we expressed a decided opinion,
that in case Cuba should be "Africanized & become a second
St. Domingo with all its attendant horrors to the white race" &c. &c.
we ought not then to hesitate. By this opinion, I shall
always stand. The publication of it, notwithstanding the

article in the Times, will do good & has ^{in my opinion already} done good in Europe.
It has, at least, attracted public attention to the subjects here,
especially among the Spanish Bond holders, & you know how
difficult ~~it is~~ this is, in regard to an American ^{question} subject.

But I did not sit down to write about this, but
concerning a more agreeable subject. I send you the
Port of Yesterday Morning, containing an imperfect
account of the proceedings at the Seamen's Hospital dinner.
You will be surprised & gratified with the remarks
of Lord Palmerston on that occasion respecting our Country.
They were received by the Company with enthusiastic
applause, as were mine in response. There were no regular
reporters present, & although the substance of my remarks
was given, yet the form does not do me justice. I send
them to you as prepared by myself & they contain the exact
truth. I have thought if you deemed it proper to publish
an account of the proceedings, you might publish ^{the remarks} them as
sent to you ~~without~~, instead of what is contained in the
Port. I desire that my Countrymen should know exactly
what I ^{did} say. You would not of course refer to the source

from which they proceeded.

In conversing with Lord Salisbury on Wednesday evening last I found that he entertained but a slight hope that the Vienna conference would terminate in peace. He did not believe that the Emperor of Russia would accede to such terms as would sufficiently restrain his power in the Black Sea; & without this it would be but a hollow truce & the allies would have to do

the work over again. I need not say this is emphatically confidential, though you can use the information, without any reference to names.

Yours very respectfully

James Buchanan

General James Watson Webb.

Strictly Confidential

Legation of the United States
London 30 March 1855 My dear Sir:

I observe you are down upon the Ostend Conference "like a hundred of brick". This I did not expect after what had passed between us; but no matter.

In case of failure to purchase Cuba, - what ought to be our future course? On re-perusing the suggestions of the Conference, I find nothing which I should desire to change. We could then only interfere by force, in a case of self preservation so clearly made out as to be consistent with our past history & manifestly justified by this great and imperative law. It is true that we expected a decided opinion, that in case Cuba should be "Africanized & become a second St. Domingo with all the attendant horrors to the White race" &c &c we ought not then to hesitate. By this opinion, I shall always stand. The publication of it, notwithstanding the

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article in the Times, will do good & has in my opinion already done good In Europe. It has, at least, attracted public attention to the subject here, especially among the Spanish Bond holders, & you know how difficult ~~it is~~ this is, in regard to an American subject question.

But I did not sit down to write about this, but concerning a more agreeable subject. I send you the Post of yesterday morning, containing an imperfect account of the proceedings at the Seamen's Hospital dinner. You will be surprised and gratified with the remarks of Lord Palmerston on that occasion respecting our Country. They were received by the Company with enthusiastic applause, as were mine in response. There were no regular reporters present, & although the substance of my remarks was given, yet the form does not do me justice. I send them to you as prepared by myself & they contain the exact truth. I have thought if you deemed it proper to publish an account of the proceedings, you might publish ~~them~~ the remarks as sent to you ~~without~~ instead of what is contained in the Post. I desire that my Countrymen should know exactly what I did say. You would not of course refer to the source

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Yours very respectfully
James Buchanan

General James Watson Webb

Private

Legation of the United States,

London, June 1855.

James Buchanan

My dear General,

I have received your
kind note of the 15th ultimo, & most
sincerely regret that you have suffered
so much from gout. This is the
penalty which you pay for having
enjoyed the good things of this life.
Besides, I believe it is your inheritance,
from a most worthy ancestor. I began
to relinquish the hope of seeing you in
London before I shall leave the Legation.
This would indeed be a source of
pleasure to me.
Although not in the slightest degree,

offended, by the remarks of the Council
& Enquiry on the Report of the Orders,
Conference, yet I am gratified to learn
that you were not the author of them.

You quote my remarks of which of
course I kept no copy. I think the
report itself fully justifies those remarks.
I may read that part of it over again.
I shall never explain it. There is

not a line in it which is not
sandwiched by my deliberate approbation.

The truth is that Bonnell got up
the phrase of "Cession or Seizure," & he
was followed by many of the American
& English Journals. But not so in
Spain, nor even in France. I have
inquired from all sources whether any
Spanish Journal had commented severely

Expose it; & my information is that
this has not been the case. It was
translated into Spanish & published &
is the subject of conversation in Madrid.
It has done good by familiarising the
Subjects in Spain. A distinguished
foreign Diplomatist from Madrid now in
Paris told a friend of mine ^{a few days ago} that he
believed, if the affair were well managed
& the people familiarised with ^{the} advantages
to them of the Sale of Cuba, the object
might be accomplished. But the subject
now sleeps & let it rest for the present.
I know not what are the instructions to
General Dodge. — Had our recommendation
been adopted, we would have found
powerful auxiliaries in the Spanish Bond
holders; & I believe in the Spanish Clergy.
There would then have been no necessity for
the Sale of ecclesiastical property.

After much apparent vacillation
& cogency with the friends of peace, Lord
Palmerston & Lord John have now become
highly belligerent. This is still, unquestionably
the sentiment of the British people. John
Russell desires to recover the prestige which
he has lost, Lord P. had lost much
of his popularity; but his present course
& the late success in the Crimea
may do much to restore it.

The weather has been so cold & so
unfavorable in England as to cause
considerable fears concerning their wheat
crop. It is indeed very backward. Even
a partial failure of the crop would be
a terrible misfortune to this country &
I must truly & sincerely hope, they may
not experience.

With sentiments of regard, I remain
truly your friend
General Webb; James Buchanan

Private

Legation of the United States
London 1 June 1855

My dear General/

I have received your kind note of the 15th. ultimo, & most sincerely regret that you have suffered so much from gout. This is the penalty which you pay for having enjoyed the good things of this life. Besides, I believe it is your inheritance, from a most worthy ancestor. I begin to relinquish the hope of seeing you in London before I shall leave the Legation. This would indeed be a source of pleasure to me.

Although not in the slightest degree,

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offended by the remarks of the Courier & Enquirer on the Report of the Ostend Conference, yet I am gratified to learn that you were not the author of them. You quote my remarks of which of course I kept no copy. I think the report itself fully justified these remarks. Pray read that part of it over again. I shall never explain it. There is not a line in it which is not-sanctioned by my deliberate approbation. The truth is that Bennett got up the phrase of "Cession or Seizure", & he was followed by many of the American & English Journals. But not so in Spain, nor even in France. I have inquired from all sources whether any Spanish journal had commented severely

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upon it; & my information is that this has not been the case. It was translated into Spanish & published & is the subject of conversation in Madrid. It has done good by familiarizing the Subject in Spain. A distinguished foreign Diplomatist from Madrid now in Paris told a friend of mine a few days ago, that he believed, if the affair were well managed & the people familiarized with the advantages to them of the sale of Cuba, the object might be accomplished. But the subject now sleeps & let it rest for the present. I know not what are the instructions to General Dodge. Had our recommendations been adopted, we would have found powerful auxiliaries in the Spanish Bond holders; & I believe in the Spanish Cergy. There would then have been no necessity for the sale of ecclesiastical property.

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After much apparent vacillation & coquetry with the friends of peace, Lord Palmerston & Lord John have now become highly belligerent. This is still, unquestionably the sentiment of the British people. John Ball desires to recover the prestige which he has lost. Lord P. had lost much of his popularity; but his present course & the late successes in the Crimea may do much to restore it.

The weather has been so cold & so unfavorable in England as to cause considerable fears concerning their wheat crop. It is indeed very backward. Even a partial failure of the crop would

be a terrible misfortune to this country we. I must truly & sincerely hope they may not experience.

With sentiment of regard, I remain

truly your friend
James Buchanan

General Webb

London Nov. 2nd 1855. Private

James Buchanan.

Legation of the United States

London 2 November 55

My dear General,

I once more appeal
to your personal kindness which has
never failed me. You will see by the
Leading article in the Times of yesterday
morning what extravagant expressions
are attributed to me which, as you were
here at the time, you will believe to be
unfounded. I sent to the Times on
yesterday a ^{most temperate} ~~calm~~ ^{contradiction} I stated that
they had been "misinformed". This has
not appeared this morning; ⁺ from the
character of the Paper, it is quite probable,
the assertions will be reiterated tomorrow
morning, though infamously false. Please
to take care of me in this matter.

The sending of the fleet & the Leader in
the Times of Thursday the 25th October
have raised a terrible storm in this
Country. The fleet is sent in order to
prevent Russian Troopships from leaving
the Port of New York! This is the
principal reason given.

The storm will eventually, I think,
be good. The people of this Country,
especially the manufacturing & mercantile
classes, have become excited & alarmed.
A few days ago there was a dead
calm & a total ignorance concerning
American affairs. Every body is now
inquiring into the different questions between
the two Countries. The article in the
Times fell among the people like a
stroke of lightning from a cloudless sky.

Every body asked his neighbour, what does this mean? So far as I can learn,

the tendency of public opinion is strongly against ^{these} ~~these~~ ^{reckless} ^{& apparently menacing} acts of Lord Palmerston.

We are ably defended in the Press & the better hostility of the Times ^{towards the U.S.} is denounced. Well might Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool &c be alarmed at the apprehension of war.

I do not believe there is cause for serious alarm; but yet the two Governments, as you know, are at points on the Central American questions. You may state as a statistical fact derived from official Documents, that the Exports from Great Britain to the United States during the last financial year were of the value of £21,410,369 Sterling,

more than one third of the value of all their exports to all foreign Countries & Colonies.

This ~~sum~~ ^{amount} was considerably greater than preceding year.

It is out of all character to drag a
foreign minister into the columns of the
Times which is the unprincipled Grant of
the Press.

I had expected ere this to be
in my native land & then that I
might go home in the Atlantic which
will leave on the 19th Instant; but the
"map" which has been raised ^{& probably will} may
delay me here until my successor
shall arrive. I have not the least
intention as to who he ~~shall~~ ^{will} be.

I am very anxious to get away, although
still treated with much kindness.

With my kindest regards, I
remain always sincerely your friend.

James Buchanan
General Webb,

Private

Legation of the United States
London 2 November 55

My dear General/

I once more appeal to your personal kindness which has never failed me. You will see by the leading article in the Times of yesterday morning what extravagant expressions are attributed to me which, as you were here at the time, you will believe to be unfounded. I sent to the Times of yesterday a most temperate ~~contra~~ contradiction & stated that they had been "misinformed". This has not appeared this morning; & from the character of the Paper, it is quite probable, the assertions will be reiterated tomorrow morning, though infamously false. Please to take care of me in this matter.

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The sending of the fleet and the Leader in the Times of Thursday the 25th. October have raised a terrible storm in this country. The fleet is sent in order to prevent Russian Privateers from leaving the port of New York! This is the principal reason given.

The storm will eventuate, I think, in good. The people of this Country, especially the manufacturing & mercantile classes, have become excited and alarmed. A few days ago there was a dead calm and a total ignorance concerning American affairs. Everybody is now inquiring into the different questions between the two Countries. The article in the Times fell among the people like a stroke of lightning from a cloudless sky.

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Every body asked his neighbor, what does this mean? So far as I can learn, the tendency of public opinion is strongly against ~~these~~ this reckless & apparently menacing act of Lord Palmerston. We are ably defended in the Press & the bitter hostility of the Times towards the U. S. is denounced. Well might Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool etc, be alarmed at the apprehension of war. I do not believe there is cause for serious alarm; but yet the two Governments, as you know, are at points on the Central American questions. You may state as a statistical fact derived from official Documents, that the Exports from Great Britain to the United States during the last financial year were of the value of £21,410,369 sterling, more than one third of the value of all their exports to all foreign countries & foreign colonies. This ~~sum~~ amount was considerably greater than the preceding year.

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It is out of all character to drag a foreign minister into the Columns of the Times which is the unprincipled grant of the Press.

I had expected ere this to be in my native land & then that I might go home in the Atlantic which will leave on the 17h. Instant; but the "muss" which has been raised may, and probably

will detain me here unless my successor shall arrive. I have not the least intimation will as to who he ~~shall~~ will be. I am very anxious to get away, although still treated with much kindness. With my kindest regards, I remain always sincerely your friend.

James Buchanan

General Webb.

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Private

Legation of The United States.

London 7 December 1855.

My dear Sir,

Many, very many

thanks to you for your able & judi-
-cious article setting me right in
regards to the misrepresentations of the
Times. For your conduct towards me
since I have been in England you have
placed me under obligations which I
shall be ever proud to acknowledge;

I told Moran he had better
address you a letter giving you the
earliest information concerning peace
which, I think, will be ere long con-
-cluded. The London Press is strangely
befogged upon this subject. There is
more foundation for the statements of

alloran on this subject than he
himself or the world knows.

He has inserted several things
about myself which I did not intend,
& it is now too late for him to
correct them. I may strike them all
out; as I fear you may compromise
yourself with your own party by
the friendship, I am happy to say, you
have evinced towards myself.

I was, at one time, in high hopes
we might hereafter act together
politically. It is not in your nature,
to be a free soiler or a Know Nothing,
& you have ever ably sustained the
Constitution & the Union. Where else
can you eventually go ~~but~~^{but} to the
National Democracy, where so many

Independent National Whigs have
already gone? And they have done
this without the slightest sacrifice
of consistency or principle. For one,
I should receive you with open arms.

In regard to the future I now feel
as independent as a wood sawyer,
having effectually banished the Presidential
maggot from both my head & heart.

I have received your advice through
Miss Lane. I shall not dispute
its wisdom & there is no doubt of
its friendship. I might follow it,
if I felt the least desire to be
President. In truth I know not
when I shall return. It is certain
that I cannot ^{abandon my post} ~~leave~~, without any
person to leave behind me, except

W. Moran.

With sentiments of sincere regard,
I remain always your friend.

James Buchanan

General James Watson Webb

London Dec. 7th 1833
James Buchanan

Private

Legation of the United States.
London 7 December 1855.

My dear Sir/

Many, very many thanks to you for your able & judicious article setting me right in regard to the misrepresentations of the Times. For your conduct towards me since I have been in England you have placed me under obligations which I shall be ever proceed to acknowledge.

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I was, at one time, in high hopes we might hereafter act together politically. It is not in your nature, to be a free soiler or a Know Nothing, & you have ever ably sustained the Constitution & the Union. Where else can you eventually go ~~than~~ but to the National Democracy, where so many

[Page Break]

independent National Whigs have already gone? And they have done this without the slightest sacrifice of consistency or principle. For one, I should receive you with open arms.

In regard to the future I now feel as independent as a wood sawyer, having effectually banished the Presidential maggot from both my head & heart. I have received your advice through Miss Lane. I shall not dispute its wisdom & there is no doubt of its friendship. I might follow it if I felt the least desire to be President. In truth I know not when I shall return. It is certain that I cannot ~~leave~~ abandon my post, without any person to leave behind me, except

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Mr. Moran.

With sentiments of sincere regard, I remain always your friend.

James Buchanan

General James Watson Webb