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Title: Letter from James Buchanan to John M. Read

Date: 1843-1849

Location: MC 1998.10

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Washington 5 December 1843.

My dear Sir /

I regret that I could not pass through Philadelphia on my way to this city. It will most probably be necessary that I should pass one or two days in ^{of city} Philadelphia, before the first of April; and if so, I shall certainly enjoy the pleasure of making your house my home.

I am far from being one of those who feel offended with advice which they ~~cannot~~ ^{will not} follow. There is no man in the States to whom I am personally or politically more attached than to Mr. Muhlenberg; and yet such are my feelings & obligations towards Mr. Hunt, that I cannot take any part between these two men; ~~further than~~ ^{but shall} commend & defend them both whenever they may be assailed. For me & for them, I believe this is true policy, and the ends will show. I ardently desire that the one or the other of them should be nominated & elected, and I think the chances are in favor of Mr. Muhlenberg. So far as my influence extends, I shall endeavor to prevent any such exasperation of feeling between their friends as might produce the nomination of a new man greatly inferior to either. I have been frank & candid

with Mr. Muhlenberg himself & I believe he is satisfied.

Now for the other side of the question; - I have never heard from Shunk himself upon the subject, but some of his friends write me strange letters. They point to the leading Van Buren men - some where from Henry Horn to John Galbraith & they say wherever you find a Van Buren man you find a Muhlenberg man & in very many instances not merely a Van Buren man, but a personal enemy of Buchanan. They ask what can you expect from an administration the most devoted & confidential friends of which are your enemies. And one letter goes so far as to say that it is the boast of one of Mr. M.'s friends in Erie County whose name I shall not mention that Mr. M. will be elected Governor & then will supersede me entirely & become the Candidate for the Vice Presidency.

Now I need scarcely say to you that all these things move me not nor diminish in the slightest degree my confidence in Mr. Muhlenberg; although I believe I have not a personal enemy in the Democratic party of the State who is not a devoted friend of Mr. Muhlenberg. -

With every sentiment of respect & kindness, I remain

Your friend

John. M. Read Esq

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Confidential

Senate Chamber 22 March 1844

My dear Sir /

I have been desirous of writing to you for several days; but am so incessantly occupied that I have not found the time. I now write in the midst of a debate.

Judging from the information I receive from the West, I fear that things do not look as favorable there for Elliklenburg as I could desire. ~~It is my wish~~ to write a letter expressing my feelings strongly within a compass of two columns of a Country Newspaper. Occasions will not be wanting.

Now what I wish from you is ~~to~~ to state the topics most desirable to be introduced & the facts in support of those. I have not the time necessary to collect them.

Our friend is injured by the false supposition ~~that~~ of Polkism; & the warm support of most of the swindling brood to which the present administration has given birth. Yet I do not know, how any reference can be made ~~by~~ me on this subject; unless the general & strong declaration that M. stand wholly uncommitted & unpledged to any human being.

There are some who from the hostility of the Pennsylvanian & several of those who control it, ^{& from other causes} to myself believe that W. Elliklenburg is not friendly to ~~myself~~ ^{me}. My letter would put an end to all such suppositions.

After writing the letter, if such a letter should be deemed advisable, I would send it to you so that it may be submitted to Mr. Ell; for we ought to be very cautious lest any thing contained in it may do harm.

I leave this matter very much to your discretion & should be glad to hear from you in a legible manner.

I fear the County of Westmoreland more than any other in the State.

John. M. Read Esq

from your friend
James Buchanan

P.S. I understand that Shunk is doing his duty like a man: though I have never written here a line nor had a line from him on the Governor's question, my neutral position between Shunk & Muhlenberg may give some weight to my letter. Ought the proceedings of 35 to be alluded to?

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Wheatland 18 August 1849.

My dear Sir /

I rejoice to learn that you have accepted my invitation & that I may indulge the hope of seeing you ere long at Wheatland. It is my earnest desire that our difference of opinion on the free Soil question shall not, in the slightest degree, interfere with our personal friendship: and I know that I shall not say or do, nor have I said or done any thing which could give you the slightest cause of offence.

Whilst I do not deny the power of Congress to legislate on the question of Slavery in the territories; yet I am deeply convinced that the passage of the Wilmot proviso in any form would be unnecessary to accomplish the object of its friends, unjust to the South & dangerous to the Union. It may probably pass & I doubt not will be approved by General Taylor. In that event, we shall have reached a real crisis. The South will then be united & the fire which has long been smouldering will burst forth, not in an ignis fatuus blaze as heretofore but with steady intensity. They will insist that the agitation of the question shall cease in regard to the District of Columbia, unless it should be raised by the people of that District: & that efficient measures shall be adopted to carry into effect that clause of the Constitution, without which the Constitution never would have existed, to enable them to reclaim their runaway slaves. They say, with truth, that whilst the agitation of the Slave question in the North may be sport to us, it

may also, ^{prove} ~~become~~ death to them: It produces an uneasy & excited feeling among the Slaves & places in jeopardy the safety of all they hold most dear on earth. Devotedly attached to the Union as they are, they soberly declare that if the North should persist in applying the match to the Magazine of gun powder in which they live, self preservation will compel them to separate from us.

I have no doubt that the Union must & will be preserved; that the North will eventually perceive the propriety of refraining from all unnecessary agitation on the subject; & that the South will not flare up as they have done heretofore upon every trifling occasion. But in order to accomplish this object, we shall probably have to pass through a tremendous storm. As the North we are totally ignorant of the deep, pervading & determined feeling of the South on this subject. It is not a political feeling; but one that is domestic & self preserving.

I am as much opposed to slavery in the abstract as you can be; but whether popular or not, I shall ever adhere to the Constitution in letter & in spirit & to our glorious compact of Union. I have expressed my sentiments on this subject in my Books County letters to them I shall adhere. I know that the Missouri Compromise, which I believe to be entirely constitutional, is now out of the question; but I shall assume no new ground. I write you this letter confidentially, without any hope of inducing you to change your ground, but merely to communicate my own convictions. In the expectation of seeing you soon, I remain, sincerely

John M. Read Esq

Your friend
James Buchanan

P.S. as I am often from home for a day, I would thank you to
let me know the day before you come to Lancaster. I will send
for you to the cars.

[Faint, mostly illegible handwriting throughout the page]

[Vertical handwritten note on the left margin]

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