

York April 9 1879

My Dear Sir

There seems to be some attempt at pressure upon you and Mr. E. Y. Buchanan on the subject of a biography. Letters talks and newspaper articles indicate the wish of some leading Democrats that I should write it. But it is not my wish at all and I am in no way the responsible cause of any agitation about it public or private.

Mr. President Buchanan in his lifetime urged me very much to undertake it. My poverty refused consent. I had to provide for the day that was passing over my head. Efforts of his and mine to get it done by others failed sadly. Some time after his death I became satisfied, that his reputation and that of the great party which has trusted and followed him would not get the justices which they needed unless I did it. Thereupon I determined to lay aside all business and excuse whatsoever and give up some years of my life to that labor. When I told you of this intention you approved it; but when Mr. E. Y. Buchanan was asked for the papers I was surprised to discover that he had contracted a bitter animosity against me, which he thought he could gratify by withholding them. I do not say that he was wrong in being my enemy (for every man has a right to his prejudices) but he was mistaken in treating me as a candidate for his patronage. I simply desired to do a duty which I owed to the public: he prevented me, and my conscience was discharged; he did not injure me but saved me the expenditure of much time and trouble.

I was greatly gratified by Judge Cadwalladers [sic] "appointment" as you call it. In some respects his work, if he had lived to complete it, would have been an invaluable contribution to public history; while his personal defence of Mr. Buchanan would have been very full though not as aggressive upon his detractors as it ought to be.

If I had got the materials when I wanted them, I would have tried to make a book that the world would not willingly let die. It is not a boast to say that I might have succeeded, since it would have required no literary talent, but only some judgment in the arrangement of facts and a certain degree of precision in stating them. Forty years of Mr. Buchanan's life are closely connected with most important events of which the history has never been honestly told; and his own share in them has been basely misrepresented. But I cannot help it now. It is no fault of mine if the lie triumphs.

I did not mean to say this when I began. My object was merely to tell you that I not only do not desire the job but could not be persuaded to take it. This may be some relief to you. Mr. E. Y. Buchanan ought to know it for another reason; perhaps he thinks he is hurting me personally by refusing his assent. Please to assure him that my happiness does not depend in the least upon anything he may do or forbear to do in the premises. He will be in a better frame of mind when he understands that he could not patronize me if he would.



Nevertheless I lament the failure to get this biography written as a public calamity. It is a terrible loss to the Democracy and all the friends of good government & it has given our enemies the weather gauge of us and they will keep it for half a century to come.

I feel it is too late now to do any good. The interest once felt in the subject has passed away: the men who suffered with Mr. Buchanan and therefore anxious to see him righted are most of them dead. The difficulty of getting a competent man to write the truth about him under an "appointment" is increasing all the time. The probability is, that abolition lies, so far as he is concerned, will take the place of history.

"And none shall see the day

When the cloud shall pass away"

With which detraction has covered his name. Still if I were in your place I would not give it up. I think I could tell you how a perfectly good result might be accomplished right speedily. But of course no suggestion coming from me would be received. I am therefore silent.

Yours truly

J.S. Black

H.B. Swarr Esq.

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