

To James Buchanan Esquire

Allow me to congratulate you upon the notoriety you have acquired of late. Formerly the smoothness of your looks and habitual professions of moderation had led those who did not know you to suppose you mild and temperate. But the virulence with which you have assailed our present worthy Governor in anonymous publications in the newspapers, the professional offices you have employed in the slave question to quibble away the truth and distort the fact with others late incidents of your life exhibit no small degree of defect in your moral conformation.

You assume to be the leader of the opposition to Governor Findlay in this district, and have labored for many months in many ways to stir up again the fire of party animosity, to raise the standard of party strife, and to destroy the era of good feelings. Tho [sic] the mild and liberal policy of Governor Findlay's administration in judicial and other appointments was particularly felt and acknowledged in this district, you made it your business to frustrate its influence, to tear open again the wounds of party discord, to pour poison into the milk of human concord, and to heap on an amiable and worthy man epithets of abuse disgraceful to the commonwealth and injurious to the public peace. Under your tuition the son has been seen publicly reproaching the executive for appointments of which his father was one of the most prominent and conspicuous.

In pursuing this course however I fear that it has not been the spirit of party that has prompted you. The poor weak old General, the creature of the two renegade printers would scarcely have elicited so much exertion from a gentleman of your profession. A federal candidate might have inspired your violence, and the support of your party throw a veil over you want of decency and of truth in your political lucubrations. But the weak and superannuated Hiester, the intimate friend of Seib and the patron of Binns and Duane could never thus excite your costly talents.

Is it that you inherited a secret grudge against Governor Findlay? Is it that your father and his, or some of your families, years ago had a dispute in Franklin County, and have you cloaked personal revenge under the garb of party? I have heard something of this kind: but I hope you are too much of a Christian to permit ancient malice to warm your blood on the present occasion, and to prompt your gentle phillipics.

I do not believe that this alone was sufficient. Something further was necessary, something touching more nearly your interest. And allow me to congratulate you on your success. While the world thought you disinterestedly wasting yourself in the cause of the "weak old man" you had in prospective a seat in Congress as a reward of your exertions. You had learned and practiced better in the art trade and mystery of the black letter than to employ your genius in a cause without being daily rewarded.



Yet you owe your candidateship allow me to tell you more to the generosity of your coadjutors than to your own merits. Your attack on Governor Findlay for being the owner of a slave was rash in the commencement and exceedingly unfavorable in the end to the cause it was designed to support. You blindly dragged it from a law book without reflecting that the law sometimes deals in fiction, and that facts ought to be consulted before you venture to apply the law. It was on egregious professional blunder throughout, and shows that a lawyer many sometimes burn his fingers with his own tools. It has recoiled dreadfully on your cause. The friends of Governor Findlay are much obliged to you for it, while the friends of your candidate will never forgive your folly.

To go to Washington you have your own consent, and want only the People's. Will you get it? Have you ever reflected what figure you would cut, if you could succeed and if the question of slavery should arise there? Have you ever anticipated that after making a long county court speech (for I suppose you would speak tho' [sic] at the rate of a thousand Dollars a day cost to the People) against the horrors and abominations of slavery, some Southerner should ride and show you Heister's vote in 1788 in favor of allowing the slave trade and kidnapping in Pennsylvania, and the record of his slaves carefully recorded and registered at Reading from 1780 to 1806 to preserve "his property" in them, your convenience at the same time telling you that it was your mighty genius that led the way to the whole discovery.

I really fear you would cut a sorry figure. For my part I think out plain straight forward Hibshman would do pretty nearly as well as you at least for the people. He would not talk so much, nor be liable to exposure, and would cost less.

Colebrook

[Note on later envelope : letter of "Colebrook" to "Buchanan" referts [sic] to campaign fight of July 1820]

