

Mr. Chairman, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I somehow feel at home when I come to Lancaster and visit the members of the Lancaster County Historical Society. Maybe this is due to the fact that my ancestors came from this County. That reminds me of a story that perhaps is not applicable – you may judge as to whether it is or not. You may have heard the story of the man who was always talking about his descent, or ascent, from French Huguenot ancestry. He became intoxicated one day, and on the way home was discovered making a very serious and determined effort to climb a tree. Someone said, “Where are you going?” Well,” he said, “I am going away back home.”

Why should I come to Lancaster County to speak on James Buchanan? I never voted for him in my life. I always voted against him by proxy – by ancestral proxy.

My interest in Buchanan began about twenty years ago when I saw his picture in Harper’s Monthly magazine, and I observed the article was written by no less person than John Bassett Moore. The question then arose in my mind, “What does James Bassett Moore have to say about James Buchanan” – and this is what he said:

I shall speak of that later. But that aroused my interest in Buchanan.

Your Historical Society does itself honor by setting aside this year as Buchanan Year in honor of one of your greatest lawyers, President of the Board of Trustees of your splendid college, which in its origin dates back to the move for higher education in this Commonwealth. You sent him to the Legislative Halls of the Commonwealth, to the House of Representatives in the Nation Capital where he able represented the great Keystone State in the Senate of the United States – a man who was Minister to two foreign countries, Secretary of State during eh Mexican War, and President of the United States. Each and every one of these positions was filled with credit sufficient honor and glory on the great historic county in which he lived.

It is not my object to discuss his career as a whole, for the theme is too large. Nor shall I speak in detail of the controverted [sic] points concerning his career as President. Your own distinguished historian, the Hon. W. U. Hensel, has does this with far greater force and felicity of diction than I am able to command. In his address to the Cliosophic Society twenty years ago, he proved conclusively that Buchanan was neither weak nor unpatriotic. But let him tell the story:

“From their own admissions it is manifest that Mr. Buchanan was no more of a disunionist [sic] than Mr. Lincoln, and not nearly so much of one as Seward, Greeley, Beecher or Wendell Phillips; that the doctrine

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of secession, the right of a State to withdraw from the Federal Union, was not solely indigenous to the South; and that the view of the Buchanan administration on the constitutional right of the executive to coerce a seceding state, or to make war on its people, were exactly those then held by substantially all the great lawyers, judges and statesmen of the country, including Abraham Lincoln; that there was no spoliation of the public treasury, no apportionment of the federal military equipment; nor dispersion of the navy in the interest of any particular section; that in his efforts to maintain peace and prevent dismemberment of the Union, Mr. Buchanan was more aggressive, positive and definite than was Mr. Lincoln at the time; that his Secretary of State, during the time the secession movement was organizing, was more courageous and determined than Lincoln's premier, even after rebellion became far more defiant and threatening; that the attitude of Lincoln's administration toward the Confederate agents of peace was more conciliatory than Buchanan's; that in his efforts to preserve peace and effect a compromise, Mr. Buchanan had the encouragement and support of an overwhelming majority of the Northern people, and was hearkening to the almost unanimous voice of those who represented their great moral and material interests; that no act of his hastened or encouraged the outbreak of hostilities, and that nothing he might have done, and left undone, could have checked, prevented or suppressed the rebellion and the ensuing war; that Mr. Lincoln's utterances against foreign invasion or [sic] Southern territory and resort to arms, from the time of his election until his inauguration, were more emphatic for peace and conciliation than Mr. Buchanan's; that a Republican House of Representatives and Congress, as a whole, during that period, did nothing, and did not offer to do anything, to justify or support the president in assuming any other attitude toward the South or in assuming any other attitude toward the South or its rebellion than he assumed – in short, that Mr. Buchanan did no less than Mr. Lincoln would or could have done in his place during those four months, and Mr. Lincoln did, dared and said nothing before, at and immediately after his inauguration to show he was not in full accord and sympathy with the policies of the Buchanan administration.”

When it is remembered that Daniel E. Sickles, then a Congressman from New York State in the House of Representatives of the United States, said that if President Buchanan should send an



armed fore into the Southern States, New York City would join the confederacy; that Senator Lane of Oregon protested with equal force against coercion; that the Senate refused to confirm an excellent appointment, that of Peter McIntire to be collector of the port of Charleston; that a great Philadelphia newspaper stated editorially that we might as well sell Florida to Spain because we certainly can never get her back into the Union, it is evident that Hensel is stating facts with his usual exactness. It is as reasonable to suppose that President Wilson could have forced the Senate to ratify the League of Nations after Harding's election as for Buchanan to be able to influence a Congress whose members were looking to the income [sic] and not to the outgoing President for leadership.

The Historians of your County should insist that Mr. Buchanan's record be fairly and impartially placed before the public. There is no reason why this eminent statesman, who was a singularly pure minded man, and of whom it was said that he never gave man, child, or beast an unkind word, and a man who gave his best to his country, should, as he reached three score years, be made the scapegoat for the sins of the political leper.

John Bassett Moore, who edited the correspondence of Buchanan, said that diplomacy was his special gift, and Andrew E. White, President of Cornell University and Ambassador to the German States, in his autobiography states that James Buchanan was as expressive and interesting a conversationalist as he had ever met in his long career on either side of the Atlantic.

But first, let me speak briefly, for this narrow theme is even too large for the evening, of his career as a Senator. A very short time after he returned from the Russian Mission, of which I shall speak later, he was elected by the Legislature of Pennsylvania to the Senate of the United States, to succeed his successor, William Wilkins.

Please note that less than a month, to be exact, twenty-eight days after taking the oath of office as Senator, he came into conflict with Henry Clay of Kentucky on the French Spoliation claims. These claims arose from the illegal seizure and condemnation of American vessels under Napoleonic Decrees. From the close of the War of 1812 to the accession of Jackson, efforts were made to secure a settlement. The Government of Louis Philippe was more favorable to a settlement than its predecessors and France agreed to pay 25,000,000 francs, from which a reduction to satisfy the Beaumarchian heirs was to be made. The agreement was enthusiastically received in this country and the Senate promptly ratified it, but the French Chamber of Deputies failed to make the necessary appropriation. Jackson directed the Secretary of the Treasury to draw a draft on the French Minister of Finance, but the French government let the draft to protest

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and complained of the American procedure. Jackson, in his annual message, asked Congress to grant him authority to make reprisal if France refused to pay. The French Minister was recalled by his Government. Clay opposed the President and in this opposition found himself on the side of Calhoun. Buchanan immediately came to the defense of the administration. Among other things, Buchanan said,

“We must remember that France may yield with honor; we never can, without disgrace. Will she yield? That is the question. I confess I should have entertained a stronger belief that she would, had she not published the duke’s letter to Mr. Pageot as an appeal to the American people. She must still believe that the people of this country are divided in opinion in regard to the firm maintenance of their rights. In this she will find herself entirely mistaken. But should Congress, at the present session, refuse to sustain the President by adopting measures of defence [sic]; should the precedent of the last session be followed for the present year, then I shall entertain the most gloomy forebodings. The Father of the Country has informed us that the best mode of preserving peace is to be prepared for war. I firmly believe, therefore, that an unanimous vote of the Senate in favor of the resolution now before them, to follow to Europe the acceptance of the mediation, would, almost to a certainty, render it successful. It would be an act of the soundest policy as well as of the highest patriotism. It would prove, not that we intend to menace France, because such an attempt would be ridiculous; but that the American people are unanimous in the assertion of their rights, and have resolved to prepare for the worst. A French fleet is now hovering upon our coasts; and shall we sit still, with an overflowing Treasury, and have our Country defenceless [sic]? This will never be said with truth of the American Congress.

“If war should come, which God forbid, - if France should still persist in her effort to degrade the American people in the person of their Chief Magistrate, - we may appeal with confidence to victory from that Being in whose hands is the destiny of nations.”

England mediated, and the impending war was averted.

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It is interesting to note in this connection that the ablest co-defender of the Jackson policy in regard to the French Claims in the House of Representatives was the venerable John Quincy Adams. To see John Quincy Adams and James Buchanan and Andrew Jackson on the same side of a question is rather unusual.

I should like to go into detail in discussing Buchanan's Senatorial career. I must hasten. He took active part in nearly all the great discussions in the United States Senate and he matched swords with Clay, Webster, Calhoun on equal terms. When it came to thorough investigation, to practical knowledge of the case, and to careful preparation of his case, James Buchanan was the superior in many instances of any of those men.

Any man who wants to know – any student who wants to know –of our policies, of our history, of our government, who wants to know the history and theory of the veto power, will do well to read Buchanan in his reply to Calhoun on the question of the veto. Buchanan presented that petition at that critical junction in our history with the South opposed the right of petition – James Buchanan presented the petition from the Caln meeting of the Quakers praying for the abolishment of slavery in the District of Columbia. Calhoun opposed the reading of the petition. Buchanan ably defended his position and warned the South that if they make the cause of slavery identical with opposition to the freedom of speech, and object to the right of petition, their cause is lost. The result was that Mr. Buchanan's views prevailed. The petition was read and then, at the suggestion of Mr. Buchanan, the proposition was rejected because he argued that it would be unconstitutional, or a virtual violation of the constitution to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. Buchanan took prominent part in discussion in the Senate.

One or two instances will illustrate his ability to take care of himself. Once, he attempted wit at the time he was speaking. Mr. Clay arose and said, "Mr. President, the Senator from Pennsylvania is most unfortunate whenever he attempts wit." Buchanan arose and said, "Mr. President, what the Senator from Kentucky said is true. He is always equally unfortunate whenever he attempt [sic] argument."



