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Document: *Letter from James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise of Virginia*

Transcription:

Wheatland, near Lancaster 12 August 1851

I have been several weeks absent from home & this is the only why your favor of he 8th ultimo has not been sooner acknowledged. I sincerely sympathise with you in your domestic afflictions; (although childless myself, I trust I possess a heart which can feel for a bereaved parent & friend [no close quote].

The canvass for Governor & other State officers is proceeding In Pennsylvania with much spirit. Bigler is on the platform adopted by the Reading Convention & whenever & wherever he addresses people he maintains the inviolate character of the Fugitive Slave Law as a portion of the compromise & urges the repeal of our odious Obstruction Law which deprives the slave owners of the use of our jails for the detention of fugitive slaves. The issue is fairly joined & I entertain no doubt it will be decided by a large majority in favor of the Democratic Party.' Pennsylvania will then again be rectus in curia, having repudiated Governor Johnston who is as unprincipled & reckless a demagogue as the sun shines upon. Every where [sic] he goes, I am the subject of his violent attacks & this because I denounced him at a mass meeting in Lancaster for having pocketed the Act to repeal the sixth section of the Obstruction Law.

I observe that Fillmore has been making a triumphant passage though the valley of Virginia to the White Sulphur Springs. I resume his return will not be hailed by the acclamation of thousands. A more disgraceful surrender on the part of his friends, the imbecile 'silver greys' to Seward & his forces by the adoption of the Albany platform has rarely been witnessed; & thus is commended by "the Republic." The platform explicitly repudiates the idea that the Fugitive Slave Law is to be held inviolate as part of the Compromise, for the sake of the peace of the Union, & sanctions & encourages agitation for the modification or repeal of that measure. Well may Greeley, Weed & id omne genies exult in this victory. This is the platform erected for General Scott. Is it possible that Southern Whigs will agree to take their station upon it?

I addressed a friendly letter several weeks ago to Mason; but it remains without an answer. In it, I did not allude to the Presidency with reference to myself. I have not written to Mr. Hopkins.

I have a letter from one of our leading Cincinnati [Democratic] editors who has recently been travelling though Ohio. He says, to employ his own language, "The universally prevailing Sentiment among Democrats of Ohio is now, Any man by Cass.: He speaks favorably of my prospects there, but what can I expect from a Democracy so tinctured with Free Soilism.



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I am anxious to receive your "great speech" in the convention & hope you will send me a copy as soon as it is published.

So far our System of electing Judges seems to work well. ~~Both~~ Either the Democratic & or the Whig candidates for Supreme Bench would constitute quite as good a court as we have had under the appointment of the Governor: & so far as I have observed the gentlemen nominated for our District Judges are generally unexceptional in point of character & abilities. Why should not the people who are directly interested in securing for themselves all able, honest & independent Judiciary make as good a selection of Judges as the leading politicians on shoes accommodations they have been hereto appointed?

I have not written to Stockton, because long ere this I expected to see him. I shall write to him to day [sic] or tomorrow. I understand, however, from different quarters that he is politically my friend as he has ever been personally.

from your friend

very respectfully

Hon: Henry A. Wise

James Buchanan

On back of letter: Letters from [?] Buchanan, Tyler, Stockton & Cushing [?]

[Transcribed by REC, November 2020. Italicized portions of the letter were transcribed by the auction house.]

Scope and Content Note:

Letter from James Buchanan to future Governor and Confederate General Henry A. Wise of Virginia in which he discusses his stance on the Fugitive Slave Law, the political issues of the day, and his long-standing ambition to be elected President. The Compromise of 1850 had just been enacted and the issue of the Fugitive Slave Law was foremost on the minds of the American people. Discussing the gubernatorial campaign of William A. Bigler, Buchanan states: "... wherever he addresses the people he maintains the inviolate character of the Fugitive Slave Law as a portion of the compromise & urges the repeal of our odious Obstruction Law which deprives the slave owners of the use of our jails for the detention of fugitive slaves. The issue is fairly joined & I entertain no doubt it will be decided by a large majority in favor of the Democratic Party." After criticizing Governor Johnston, he turns his commentary towards President Fillmore. "I observe that Fillmore has been making a triumphant passage through the valley of Virginia to the White Sulphur Springs. I presume his return will not be hailed by the acclamation of thousands. A more disgraceful surrender on the part of his friends, the imbecile 'silver greys' to Seward & his forces by the adoption of the Albany platform has rarely been



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witnessed... The platform explicitly repudiates the idea that the Fugitive Slave Law is to be held inviolate as a part of the Compromise, for the sake of the peace of the Union, & sanctions & encourages agitation for the modification or repeal of that measure... This is the platform erected for General Scott. Is it possible that Southern Whigs will agree to take their station upon it?" On his presidential aspirations, Buchanan makes more than one reference. "I have a letter from one of our leading Cincinnati editors who has recently been travelling through Ohio. He says, to employ his own language, 'The universally prevailing sentiment among Democrats of Ohio is now, 'Any man but Cass.' He speaks favorably of my prospects there, but what can I expect from a Democracy so tinctured with Free Soilism." Wheatland near Lancaster.

