

Washington, 22d November, 1858.

Gentlemen:

I have had the honor to receive your invitation to be present, on the 25th instant, at the Centennial Anniversary of the capture of Fort Duquesne; and I regret that the pressure of public affairs, at a period so near the meeting of Congress, renders it impossible that I should enjoy this privilege.

Every patriot must rejoice whilst reflecting upon the unparalleled progress of our country within the last century. What was, at its commencement, an obscure Fort, far beyond the western frontier of civilization, has now become the centre of a populous commercial and manufacturing city, sending its productions to large and prosperous sovereign States still further west, whose territories were then a vast, unexplored and silent wilderness.

From the stand-point at which we have arrived, the anxious patriot cannot fail, whilst reviewing the past, to cast a glance into the future, and to speculate upon what may be the condition of our country when you portently shall assemble to celebrate the second Centennial Anniversary of the cap-

town of Fort Duquesne. Shall our whole country then compose one united nation more populous, powerful and free than any other which has ever existed? Or will the confederacy have been rent asunder and divided into groups of hostile and jealous States? Or may it not be possible that ere the next celebration all the fragments, exhausted by intermediate conflicts with each other, may have finally re-united and sought refuge under the shelter of one great and overshadowing Despotism?

These questions will, I firmly believe, under the Providence of God, be virtually decided by the present generation. We have reached a crisis when upon their action depends the preservation of the Union, according to the letter and spirit of the Constitution; and this once gone, all is lost.

I regret to say that the present omens are far from propitious. In the last age of the Republic it was considered almost treasonable to pronounce the word Disunion. Times have since sadly changed, and now Disunion is freely prescribed as the remedy for evanescent evils, real or imaginary, which, if left to themselves, would speedily vanish away in the progress of events.

Our revolutionary fathers have passed away, and the generation next after them, who were inspired by their personal counsel and example, have nearly all disappeared.

The present generation, deprived of these lights, must, whether they will or not, decide the fate of their posterity. Let them cherish the Union in their ^{hearts} hearts; let them resist every measure which may tend to relax or dissolve its bonds; let the citizens of different States cultivate feelings of kindness and forbearance towards each other; and let all resolve to transmit to ~~transmit~~ it to their descendants in the form and spirit they have inherited it from their forefathers; and all will then be well for our country in future times.

I shall assume the privilege of advancing years in referring to another growing and dangerous evil. In the last age, although our fathers, like ourselves, were divided into political parties which often had severe conflicts with each other, yet we never heard, until within a recent period, of the employment of money to carry elections. Should this practice increase until the votes and their Representatives in the State and National Legislatures shall become infected, the fountain of free Government will then be poisoned at its source, and we must end, as history proves, in a military despotism. A Democratic Republic, all agree, cannot long survive unless sustained by public virtue. When this is corrupted and the people become venal, then

is a cancer at the root of the tree of Liberty which must cause
it to wither and ^{to} die

Praying Almighty God that your remote posterity
may continue, century after century, for ages yet to
come, to celebrate the anniversary of the capture
of Fort Mifflin in peace and prosperity,
under the banner of the Constitution and the
Union, I remain,

Very respectfully, your friend,
James Buchanan

To Russell Errett, J. Aaron Foster, James P. Barr,
Charles McKnight, J. G. Backofen, William
M. Darlington and J. S. Righans, Esquires,
Committee of Invitation

Found among papers belonging to late W. W. Brown,
of Lancaster Pa.

This letter is not an original.
It was copied by some clerk. The
signature of Buchanan is not
genuine.

The original of this is in the
Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

See Works of James Buchanan
edited by John Bassett Moore

1910

Volumes 10, page 233-234.

W F Warner

April 1, 1928