

TWO BUCHANAN LETTERS.

As a general proposition the statement that all letters have a certain interest, will, I think, be accepted. That, however, does not carry with it the further idea that all letters are alike interesting, a fact which every person in this room can easily verify through their own experience. Perhaps all of us have received letters at some time in our lives that were of paramount interest, both to the receivers and senders, especially around the age of twenty years, but which would not prove equally interesting to an outsider. The fact that nearly all persons of mature age have a store of old letters hidden away in some old receptacle is further evidence, if any is needed, that we are a letter-writing, letter-reading and letter-preserving people. Letters hold a promising place in permanent literature. Thousands upon thousands of printed volumes consist almost exclusively of letters. Many a prominent man, whether in science, art or literature during the past century, is to-day better known by the letters he wrote and received than by the work he did in his special department. In their letters to their friends, men and women in their confidential moments speak with a frankness that is unusual in ordinary conversation and things go on record that later become valuable as actual history. Many a fact that never finds its way into the everyday histories at last emerges into the light through the medium of a friendly letter.

Viewed in this light, the letters of distinguished men, whatever their pro-

fession or calling, are matters of interest, not alone to their contemporaries, but even more so to those of later times. It is for this reason that I wish to read to you two brief letters to-night. They were both written by one of the most distinguished citizens this country ever had, and as both are concerned with other men, also natives of this locality, they have from first to last a distinctly local flavor. One of them loses none of its interest in being addressed to the brave soldier and sturdy patriot who won one of our country's greatest victories on the plains of Chalmette, and who was twice President of the United States, coming from another man, who, seventeen years later, was himself elected to that high office.

Letter to General Jackson.

But here are the letters, neither of which has ever been in print. I present them in the order in which they were written:

“Lancaster 2 July 1839.

“My dear General.

“My friend & neighbor James A. Caldwell Esquire, being about to visit Tennessee for the purpose of making sale of some lands there, proposes to make a pilgrimage to the Hermitage. He is now a Democratic Senator from this County, in our State Legislature, and a gentleman whose public & private character stands equally fair. From the day when your name was first brought before your country in connexion with the office of President of the United States, until the present moment, he has been your sincere, active & devoted friend. I believe he has already been introduced to you; but lest you may have forgotten him, I give him this testimonial.

“With sentiments of affectionate respect

“I remain sincerely your friend

“JAMES BUCHANAN.

“General Andrew Jackson.”

The Caldwell family of Lancaster came to Pennsylvania during the first quarter of the eighteenth century from Scotland, Andrew Caldwell being the first arrival. He took up 285 acres of land on the old Philadelphia road, near the line between Leacock and Salisbury townships. He was, of course, a staunch Presbyterian, and was largely instrumental in founding the old Presbyterian meeting-house at Pequea.

The James A. Caldwell mentioned in Mr. Buchanan's letter was a direct descendant of the Andrew mentioned. He was for many years engaged in the slate-quarrying business at Peach Bottom, in Fulton township. He was a prominent citizen of the lower end and a man of high character. He was elected to the State Senate in 1837 from this Senatorial District, which at that time comprised the counties of Lancaster and York. He was an ardent Democrat, and naturally became a close political associate of Mr. Buchanan.

Letter to Governor David R. Porter.

The second letter, also written by Mr. Buchanan, reads as follows:

"Dear Governor: I have been intimately acquainted with George W. Barton esquire of Philadelphia ever since he commenced the study of the law, many years ago, under my direction. In my opinion he possesses extraordinary talents & would ably & satisfactorily discharge the duties of a criminal Judge. As one of the Deputies of the Attorney General in the city of Philadelphia he has had ample opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of criminal law and its practice; and from all I can learn he has assiduously improved these advantages. Indeed such are his talents & such his

standing at the bar, that I have been astonished he would accept the appointment.

“Mr. Barton is also a gentleman of strict integrity & honor who would, I am convinced, administer the laws with strict impartiality & justice & without fear, favor or affection.

“JAMES BUCHANAN.

“Washington 19 February 1840.

“To David R. Porter,

“Governor of Penna.”

A Brilliant, But Erratic, Character.

The George W. Barton alluded to in President Buchanan's letter was born in Lancaster city, September, 1807. He was the grandson of the Rev. Thomas Barton, the loyalist, and his grandmother was Esther Rittenhouse, the sister of the celebrated astronomer, David Rittenhouse. Coming from such stock, we have a right to look for a man of brilliant mind and attainments in young Barton. That he was such a person is very well known. That he did not obtain to greater personal prominence was due to his volatile and erratic character. Even from early youth he displayed some of those peculiar personal characteristics that distinguished him in his later career. Bright as he was, books seem to have had no attraction for him, although the best masters were at his command, both in this city and at the famous Moravian school at Nazareth, at which latter place he remained several years. Other things, however, proved more attractive than his studies, and he returned to Lancaster to enter a printing office, his aversion to any of the learned professions being decidedly pronounced.

But he tired of the printing business, as he did of most other things, after a while, and drifted to Philadel-

phia. Here he met his older cousin, who was professor of botany in the Jefferson College, and, being persuaded by his relative, he entered with zeal on the study of that science. Returning to Lancaster, he for a while longer pursued his botanical studies, but at length, tiring of that, he resolved, with his usual longing for adventure, to travel. He, accordingly, went on ship-board, and made several voyages to foreign lands, during the course of which he managed to get shipwrecked on the coast of Buenos Ayres, South America. Looking up the nearest American Consul, he secured a pass and returned to his native land. Something of the character of Barton may be understood when I say he passed through all these various events and adventures before he was sixteen years old.

But the spirit of adventure was still upon him—indeed, it never left him—and after remaining at home a year or two he went roving again, this time to Tennessee, where he resumed his old employment of printer, and remained about four years. It is said that some of his literary productions in the local newspapers having attracted attention to that once famous Southwestern politician, Felix Grundy, that gentleman offered to take him into his office and make a lawyer of him. But the liking for the law had not yet come upon him and he declined the offer.

His mother having died about this time, young Barton returned to Lancaster, getting here about the time when General Jackson's first campaign for the Presidency was in full blast. He threw himself into the canvass, and was an ardent champion of the distinguished Tennessean, both with voice and pen making a reputation for himself as a brilliant writer and speaker. Mr. Buchanan, having met him in

Cheeves' woods at a political gathering, was attracted by his genial flow of spirits and the brilliancy of his conversation. The result was that the future President invited him to call at his office, and there, overcoming his former scruples, persuaded him to begin the study of the law in his office. He must have been a bright student, for two years later, in 1830, he was admitted to the Lancaster Bar.

He at once began the practice of his profession in Lancaster, and entered upon that brilliant career which is still a tradition of the Bar of this city. He appears to have been a born orator, and his remarkable fluency of language united with it made him eminent as one of the most eloquent and effective of the lawyers of his time. His career in this city was, however, brief. He was appointed District Attorney for Philadelphia by Governor David R. Porter, and later was raised to the dignity of Judge of the Court of General Sessions by the same authority, a position held by him for nearly three years. Resigning this position, he resumed his practice of the law at the Philadelphia Bar, where he also established a reputation for extraordinary forensic eloquence. But, tiring of Philadelphia, he went to the Pacific Coast and began life anew there. A poor and undefended criminal one day turned up in the Court at San Francisco. He volunteered his services for the defense of the man. The extraordinary eloquence he displayed cleared his client and established his claim as the most eloquent lawyer in California. Two years after his arrival there he died—suddenly—on December 25, 1851. His career was that of a meteor, brilliant and erratic.

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