

JACKSON, BUCHANAN, AND THE "CORRUPT  
BARGAIN" CALUMNY\*

By RICHARD R. STENBERG, Ph.D.

James Buchanan denied the truth of General Jackson's public charge in 1827 of "corrupt bargain" against Clay, a charge in which Buchanan (a young Representative from Pennsylvania) was named as the "corrupt" Clay's agent. This adjourned question of veracity has never been fully solved. Some historians have believed Jackson and disbelieved Buchanan; but most of them think Buchanan's version nearer the truth, and deny a corrupt bargain. Those, however, who reject Jackson's assertions have gladly accepted the weak apology which Buchanan made for his friend's untruths—that the Old Hero labored under an *honest misapprehension*. But Jackson's private papers and the circumstances seem to reveal that he had no honest misapprehension and that the "corrupt bargain" affair merely illustrates Jackson's subtle falseness and

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\* Dr. Stenberg, after the completion of this contribution to the *Magazine*, spent considerable time at the Library of Congress in the examination of original source material for an extensive treatment of Andrew Jackson. He has just announced the discovery of amazing evidence, too late for publication here, which refers to George Kremer's letter to Mr. Jackson of March 8, 1825, published in Bassett's *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (III. 281), and discussed in this article. Dr. Stenberg writes that the "postscript" to the Kremer letter has every appearance of being a forgery added by Jackson himself. His forthcoming book, *The Insidious Andrew Jackson*, will contain a photograph of the Kremer document, so that the "postscript" may be compared with the main body of the letter. When this document appears in this new and surprising light, it will be difficult to believe that Buchanan told Kremer that he and Henry Clay had become "great friends". Other bits of evidence bearing upon the Kremer incident, necessarily omitted in this article, will appear in Dr. Stenberg's book. *Editor*.

capacity for intrigue—a side of his callous character too little known today. Jackson himself seems to have instigated the miserable slander of his political rivals which he assiduously furthered.

Defeated in the popular polling of 1824, Clay at first favored Crawford but because of the Georgian's failing health turned to Adams. This decision, which Clay told to several friends before leaving Kentucky to attend the new session of Congress, was not publicly known, and friends of the three remaining candidates for election by the House constantly importuned him, on the assumption, as he relates, "that my friends have the power of deciding the question, and then that I have the power of controlling my friends."<sup>1</sup> Buchanan hoped for a foreign mission from Jackson's elevation, and interviewed Clay in December, 1824, in the presence of Governor Letcher. He assured the unresponsive Clay, whom he would induce to support Jackson, that the latter "would not go out of this room for a Secretary of State." Receiving no encouragement, Buchanan felt that he had been indiscreet, and it was at his earnest request that Clay and Letcher refrained from making public this interview during the virulent assault on Clay by the Old Hero's busy partisans. There seem to have been other overtures by *Jackson's* friends to the Clay faction, besides Buchanan's. John Sloane of Ohio states that Sam Houston, Jackson's protégé,

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<sup>1</sup> Clay to F. P. Blair, January 8, 1825, in C. Colton, *Works of Henry Clay*, IV. 109, 110. At this time Blair and Amos Kendall went over from Clay to the rising sun Jackson, and they soon made insinuations in the public prints that this early innocent letter of Clay's showed a spirit of "corruption." They sedulously abstained from publishing the letter until Clay finally called them to account in 1828, making a public exposure of their moral turpitude. Clay published several friendly letters from Kendall, dated January 21 and February 20, 1825, and October 11, 1826, which showed that the latter could have had no early conviction of corruption in Clay. Clay in *U. S. Telegraph, Extra*, July 26, 1828, pp. 306-315.

solicited the vote of the Ohio delegation, promising that Clay would be Secretary of State under Jackson.<sup>2</sup>

Buchanan went also, on his own responsibility, in December, 1824, to two of Jackson's friends, Representative George Kremer of Pennsylvania and Senator John H. Eaton of Tennessee. He asked them to tell Jackson that Adams's friends were said to be making offers of the Secretaryship to Clay in return for aid, and asked them to advise Jackson to declare that he had not decided whom he would appoint Secretary of State, or, if he had already decided, to make known his choice. Buchanan said that Clay's friends supposed that Jackson favored Adams for the Secretaryship. Buchanan wanted a statement from Jackson to end the uncertainty—if possible, one leaving Clay's friends such hope of Clay's appointment that they might vote for Jackson. Kremer and Eaton suggested that Buchanan himself go to Jackson, which he did. Buchanan asked Jackson if he had decided whom he would appoint, mentioning the rumored intriguing of Adams's friends and advising him to make as favorable a statement as he could. Jackson hated Clay for his severe arraignment of the Seminole War in 1818, but was willing to bid for the support of Clay's friends and assured Buchanan that if "his right hand knew what his left would do on the subject of appointments to office, he would cut it off, and cast it into the fire." He did not add that he knew whom he would *not* appoint. Adams had defended the General's Seminole War, so that J. S. Barbour might well say that Jackson "as certainly intended at that time, to continue Adams his Secretary of State, as he had hair to cut off. This paltering in a double sense might be a part of that sinister policy, which Jackson was as dextrous in playing as any left-

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<sup>2</sup> Colton, *Clay*, I. 418; IV. 492, 489; cf. Sloane in *Niles' Register* (Baltimore), XXXIII. 306, and Duncan M'Arthur in *ibid.*, 305.

handed tactician of his times."<sup>3</sup> The above account of the interview, given by Buchanan, approved by Andrew Jackson, Jr., in 1856, and borne out by Clay's statement of his meagre relations with Buchanan, is to be considered substantially true. It is not known certainly which of Buchanan's interviews was the earlier, that with Jackson or that with Clay, but as no understanding resulted the point is not essential, though it is by all odds more probable that *Buchanan saw Jackson first*. Is it likely that Buchanan would have made such an overture as he did to Clay without knowing something of Jackson's disposition? Kendall is cited as stating that *after talking with Jackson* Buchanan felt such assurance as to tell some Kentucky Congressmen that Jackson would offer the State Department to Clay if elected through his friends.<sup>4</sup>

Clay publicly announced his support of Adams on January 24, 1825; and the next day appeared Kremer's anonymous letter citing the rumor that Clay's friends had hinted

that they, like the Swiss, could fight for those who pay best. Overtures were said to have been made by the friends of Adams to the friends of Clay. . . . And the friends of Clay gave the information to the friends of Jackson and hinted, that if the friends of Jackson would offer the same price, they would close with them. But none of the friends of Jackson would descend to such mean barter and sale.

No direct charge is made: all is insinuated and rumored, and Clay and Adams themselves are not directly involved. This letter, patently based on Bu-

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<sup>3</sup> Buchanan's public letter of August 8, 1827, in *Niles' Register* (Baltimore), XXXII. 415, 416; Barbour to Calhoun, March 5, 1846, in C. S. Boucher and R. P. Brooks, editors, "The Correspondence to Calhoun," in *American Historical Association Report*, 1929, pp. 329-331; *New York Public Library Bulletin*, IV., 292. Jackson was reported to have said in 1824 that if elected he would make Adams his Secretary of State. William Plumer, Jr., to Plumer, April 26, 1824, in E. S. Brown, *The Missouri Compromises and Presidential Politics, 1820-1825*, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> [W. J. Snelling], *Life of Jackson, by a Free Man* (1831), p. 149.

chanan's conversations with Eaton and Kremer, was doubtless fabricated by Eaton, one of Jackson's chief wire-pullers, who was closeted with Kremer the day before the letter came forth. No one thought that Kremer, who avowed its authorship when Clay challenged its hidden author to come forward, was more than the tool of others not anxious to be known. Clay ventured to think Jackson the real author: "Circumstances render it highly probable that it was written by Mr. Eaton, and with the knowledge of General Jackson." If not really instigated or authorized by Jackson, the charge was at least connived at, augmented and disseminated by him. Eaton did not deny having been with Kremer, and admitted having subsidized the *Philadelphia Columbian Observer*, which published Kremer's letter, a transaction which he made light of as "to my mind a very innocent and unoffending one." "Honest" George Kremer—an eccentric, well-meaning man of slender intellect, thitherto chiefly noted for his leopard-skin jacket—assured Clay, in the hearing of several other Congressmen, that he had intended no imputation against Clay.<sup>5</sup> And in truth the letter had not actually made any. It was only Jackson's starting point. Clay viewed this double-edged proceeding, in motive, as partly a "scheme of intimidation" to force him to aid Jackson.

The election over, and Clay having been appointed Secretary of State by Adams, Jackson began denounce-

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<sup>5</sup> Clay's Address at Lexington, Kentucky, July 12, 1827, in *Niles' Register*, XXXII. 375; Clay's Address of December, 1827, in Colton, *Clay*, I. 359; James Parton, *Life of Jackson*, III. 106; J. Q. Adams, *Memoirs*, VI. 513. Kremer refused to divulge the source of the "information" in his letter. When charged by Clay in 1825 with having been with Kremer and written the anonymous letter, Eaton wrote in his sneering reply: "Suppose the fact to be, that I did visit him; and suppose, too, that it was, as you have termed it a nocturnal visit; was there anything existing, that should have denied me this privilege?" Colton, *op. cit.*, I. 359, 360. See also Eaton's statement of September 18, 1827, in *Niles' Register*, XXXIII, 94-96. Also, on Kremer, see *ibid.*, 314, 315.

ing the "Judas of the West." If Clay had bargained, Adams had too, which was very convenient for electioneering purposes. Jackson wrote his friend Henry Lee on October 7, 1825:

I had esteemed him [Adams] as a virtuous, able and honest man; and when rumor was stamping the sudden union of his and the friends of Mr. Clay with intrigue, barter and bargain, I did not, nay, I could not believe that Mr. Adams participated in a management deserving such epithets. . . . But when these strange rumors became facts, when the predicted stipulation was promptly fulfilled, and Mr. Clay was *secretary of state*, the inference was irresistible. . . . From that moment I withdrew all intercourse with him.<sup>6</sup>

What cogent logic! Was this sudden loss of confidence in his rivals' honor unbidden and sincere? That Jackson was not sincere is suggested by his peculiar zeal in seeking more substantial grounds for his facile ungenerous "belief" than mere "inference," however "irresistible." Some proof or evidence was needed, and he seems deliberately to have undertaken to "frame" Clay.

Is it not deeply significant that Jackson did not immediately accuse Clay of having made a corrupt offer to him, through the agency of Buchanan? "Proof" of this still had to be obtained! Jackson's later insidious charge that Buchanan had brought him a corrupt offer from Clay in December of 1824 is not only untrue but seems deliberately false. *As late as February, 1825, Jackson was still quite unaware of Buchanan's having brought him a corrupt overture from Clay!* He wrote W. B. Lewis on February 7:

It is believed . . . this course [Clay's demand in the House for an investigation of the Kremer letter insinuations] was taken to inveigle Mr. Kremer into an apology, but if I am a Judge of human nature they have mistook the man. . . . I am told he has ample proof of the application of *Mr. Clay's friends* [to

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<sup>6</sup> J. S. Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, III. 291. This profession of Jackson's is usually accepted as sincere; see, thus, H. C. Hockett, *Introduction to Research in American History*, p. 103.

Jackson's] to support his statement in his letter. . . . How the election of President may result is impossible to tell. The rumor of Barter of office, intrigue and corruption is still afloat, which I hope for the honor of our country there is no truth in.<sup>7</sup>

If Kremer has any real proof "of the application of Mr. Clay's friends" to Jackson's, the Old Hero as yet knows nothing certain of it!

It seems that Eaton had no "proof" of Clay's corruption, for Jackson turned hopefully to Kremer. Why he did not seek such "proof" directly from Buchanan now or shortly after is strange but not inexplicable! Jackson believed he had sufficient "proof" in hand when he acquired Kremer's written statement to him, dated Washington, March 8, 1825—an affidavit solicited by Jackson just before his departure for the Hermitage to use as a support of the tangible charge he wished to make against Clay. He saw that he could best rise politically by discrediting and crushing his political rivals—a policy which President Buchanan would seem to have indulged in somewhat towards his Democratic rivals for the nomination of 1860, a prize which he probably secretly desired.<sup>8</sup> Jackson knew only too well, apparently, that Buchanan's conversation with him in December, 1824, did not warrant the charge against Clay which he wished to base on it. The divergence between Kremer's remarks on Buchanan and Clay in his affidavit to Jackson—upon which the Old Hero put great, *but not too great*, reliance—and the statements made by Jackson probably marks the extent of Jackson's deliberate deceit.

The fact that Jackson never published Kremer's

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<sup>7</sup> Jackson to Lewis, February 7, 1825, in Bassett, *Correspondence of Jackson*, III. 275. Similarly in Jackson's letters to Lewis of January 24 and 29, 1825, all was mere "rumor" of intrigue. *New York Public Library Bulletin*, IV. 197, 198. My italics above.

<sup>8</sup> "An Unnoted Factor in the Buchanan-Douglas Feud," by the writer, in *The Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XXV. 271-284 (January, 1933). Cf. T. L. Clingman, *Speeches and Writings*, p. 508; Senator Pugh in *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 2246.

letter-affidavit (which is given below) when every bit of evidence supporting his charge was greatly needed is suggestive. Yet it was only when he had procured this affidavit that he had the temerity to write a friend:

I too could have unfolded some '*voluntary information* given,' that would have been usefull to a full understanding of the corrupt course of Mr. Clays friends and himself.

The information given, first to Major Eaton, then to Mr. Kreamer, by a Representative from Pennsylvania [Buchanan], that they might communicate it to me, and which, on their refusal to be the organ, he personally communicated to me, would be an important link in the corrupt scenes at Washington, of which Mr. Clay has become the most conspicuous character. . . . If a time should arise when I conceive it proper for me to speak, I will endeavor to speak to the point, and with that energy and freedom, that the subject may require, regardless of consequences.<sup>9</sup>

Inexplicable would be this rare restraint if Jackson had any actual knowledge of corruption in Clay. Time must lend color to charges gently insinuated to the public. Thus in his famous public letter to Swartwout in March, 1825, he stressed his own virtuous abstinence from intrigue and corruption, contrasting his own course with the implied corruption of his opponents. We may well join in T. L. McKenney's "firm belief that not one of the original contrivers of this masterstroke of the political engine believed it to be true."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, while as late as February Jackson attached no importance to Buchanan's interview and spoke of all as "rumor" concerning "Clay's friends" in which he hopes there is "no truth," after obtaining the Kremer affidavit Jackson at last "realized" that Buchanan had come to him as Clay's agent with a corrupt overture! Leaving Washington in March he began sowing seeds on his homeward journey. To travelling acquaintances

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<sup>9</sup> Jackson to S. Swartwout, May 16, 1825, in Bassett, *op. cit.*, III. 285; Kremer to Jackson, March 8, 1825, in *ibid.* III., 281, 282. Jackson's letter to Swartwout was perhaps written with the expectation that it would be published, like some of his other letters to that gentleman. He would be *called on* to speak out in that case.

<sup>10</sup> T. L. McKenney, *Memoirs* (1846), I. 193.



and Jacksonian editors hither and thither he asserted "that if he would have made the same promises and offers to Mr. Clay that Mr. Adams had done," he would have been elected President, but he had refused to smirch himself. He declared indignantly that the *National Intelligencer* at Washington had been "bribed to suppress honest George Kremer's letter." To others he remarked that Clay had visited him, as well as Adams, and that he, Jackson, would have been President had he given Clay a hint of encouragement. Jackson had not the nerve to give such a hint to Clay. Jackson complained to others, including the Reverend A. Wylie, *that Clay had sent an agent with an offer to him*, but he had told the agent to go back and say that Andrew Jackson would not compass the Presidency by foul means. Some who heard these oral charges thought it rather peculiar that Jackson had, instead of proclaiming this corruption, been the loudest to greet Adams upon his elevation.<sup>11</sup> They could not know that Jackson's "knowledge" was at best a mere "inference" from Clay's subsequent appointment.

The Sage continued his clandestine slanders at the Hermitage, availing himself of every occasion to insinuate and denounce the corruption of the administration and confess his own noble patriotism. Thus in a public letter of July 31, 1826, he averred of an administration which scorned to use its patronage to perpetuate itself:

When I reflect upon the management and intrigue which are operating abroad, the magnitude of the principles which they are endeavoring to supplant, and the many means which they can draw to their assistance from the patronage of the government, I feel that it is not less due to myself and principle than to the American people, particularly so far as they have sanctioned my political creed, to steer clear of every conduct out of which the idea might arise that I was manoeuvring for my own aggrandizement. If it be true that the administration

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<sup>11</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, III. 107-110; Colton, *Clay*, I. 404-408; *Truth's Advocate*; or *Monthly Anti-Jackson Expositor*, July, 1828, pp. 275, 276.

have gone into power contrary to the voice of the nation, and are now expecting, by means of this power thus acquired, to mold the public will into an acquiescence with their authority, then is the issue fairly made out, shall the government or the people rule.<sup>12</sup>

This seems a piece of insensate hypocrisy only equalled by his forgotten statement to a friend in 1824:

In this contest I take no part. I have long since prepared my heart to say with heart-felt submission, 'May the Lord's will be done!' If it is intended by Providence that I should fill the presidential chair, I will submit to it with all humility. . . . But be assured, it will be an event I never wished, nor expected. My only ambition was to spend the remainder of my days in domestic retirement.<sup>13</sup>

It is not to be thought that Clay would tamely submit to the campaign of slander. W. P. Mangum wrote of Clay in January, 1826:

He expects that his course in relation to the presidential election will be *severely* handled in the discussion of the proposed amendments of the constitution. Gen. Vance of Ohio . . . told me some time ago, that in the event any reflexion should be cast upon their party in the debate—they had determined to propose another amendment—to-wit, that the weight 3-5 of our slaves shd. be no longer operative in that election—indeed to abolish that feature of the compromise. . . . Clay perceives that he has but little to expect from the South—and by a movement of this kind he may effectually secure the north—Pennsylvania perhaps inclusive—for it is clear that the Jackson fever has abated very much with that delegation.<sup>14</sup>

Jackson's specific accusation finally came before the public sharply in 1827 through a letter, relating a visit to the Hermitage, written by Carter Beverley on March 8, 1827. Beverley wrote that Jackson had made the *unqualified* declaration before a large company of visitors that corrupt overtures had been made to him by Clay and that he had indignantly repulsed them, leaving

<sup>12</sup> *Niles' Register*, XXXI. 103; Parton, Jackson, III. 100, 101.

<sup>13</sup> Parton, *op. cit.*, III. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Mangum to Bartlett Yancey, January 15, 1826, in Penelope McDuffie, "Chapters in the Life of Willie Person Mangum," in *Trinity College Historical Papers*, XV. 33.

Clay to close with Adams. Jackson no doubt deliberately intended to bring the matter forcefully before the public.<sup>15</sup> When Beverley's letter was attacked he called on Jackson for substantiation, which the General gave in a letter on June 5, in which he pretended that his attention had just been called to Beverley's letter of March, and expressed indignation that a citizen could not speak his honest opinions "by his own fire-side" without having them broadcast over the land. Jackson averred, now more cautiously, that "a member of Congress, of high respectability," had been the agent bringing Clay's offer—"for I did suppose he had come from Mr. Clay; although he used the term Mr. Clay's friends." This the General could hold an idle distinction! Informing him of the offers said to have been made to Clay by Adam's friends, the Congressman (so Jackson reports) declared

that the friends of Mr. Clay stated the west did not want to separate from the west; and if I would say, or permit any of my confidential friends to say, that in case I was elected president, Mr. Adams should not be continued secretary of state, by a complete union of Clay and his friends, they would put an end to the presidential contest [in Jackson's favor] in one hour. And he was of opinion it was right to fight such intriguers with their own weapons.

Jackson insinuates that he was urged to close a corrupt bargain with Clay. He speaks by innuendo, not by substantial charges.<sup>16</sup> Above all he emphasized that *he* had

<sup>15</sup> Beverley's letter in Colton, *Clay*, I. 320; Parton, *Jackson*, III. 111, 112. Jackson to Sam Houston, December 15, 1826, in Bassett, *op. cit.*, III. 325, threatening an exposure of the "wickedness of Clay."

<sup>16</sup> Jackson to Beverley, June 5, 1827, in *Niles' Register*, XXXII. 316, 317. On June 27, and again still later, Beverley wrote Jackson complaining that Clay denied Jackson's story, and asking for evidence of his charge. But to these letters the Old Hero vouchsafed no reply. Bassett, *op. cit.*, III. 366 and note. Before his death Beverley wrote Clay a letter apologizing for having been made the instrument of slander: "I am most thoroughly convinced that you were most untruthfully, and therefore unjustly treated; for I have never seen any evidence to substantiate at all the charge." Beverley's letter in *Whig Banner* (Nashville), May 25, 1844; W. H. Sparks, *The Memories of Fifty Years*, 46-48; *Niles' Register*, LXVI. 158.

refused to depart from high principle and stoop to the evil practice of his rivals. The General was *ex cathedra* and disinterested in all this, implying that he had never expressed such opinions away from the private hearth, seeming to forget having purveyed the charge in 1825 in a manner not precisely open and honorable.

Clay hotly denied the charge at last made by a responsible party, and called on Jackson for his witness or proof. He began his trenchant speech at Lexington on July 12, by remarking how strange it was that Jackson had been so long unaware (avowedly) of Beverley's letter of March 8, which had long been circulating in the prints of the country. But things more strange and peculiar marked Jackson's conduct :

At the end of more than two years after a corrupt overture is made to General Jackson, he now, for the first time, openly proclaims it. It is true, as I have ascertained since the publication of Mr. Beverley's Fayetteville letter, the general has been for a long time secretly circulating the charge. Immediately on the appearance at Washington of that letter in the public prints, the editor of the Telegraph [Duff Green] asserted, in his paper, that Gen. Jackson had communicated the overture to him about the time of the election, not as he now states [i.e., in a qualified form], but according to Mr. Beverley's version of the tale. . . . I have understood that Gen. Jackson has made a similar communication to several other persons, at different and distant points. Why has the overture been thus clandestinely circulated? Was it that through the medium of the Telegraph . . . and through his other depositories, the belief of the charge should be daily and gradually infused into the public mind? . . . Finding the public still unconvinced, has the General found it necessary to come out in proper person, through the veil of Mr. Carter Beverley's agency? . . .

General Jackson has shown, in his letter, that he is not exempt from the influence of that bias towards one's own interests, which is unfortunately the too common lot of human nature. It is *his* interest to make out that he is a person of spotless innocence, and of unsullied integrity; and to establish, by direct charge, or by necessary inference, the want of those qualities in his rival. Accordingly, we find throughout the letter, a labored attempt to set forth his own immaculate purity in striking contrast with the corruption which is attributed to others.

Clay inquired why Jackson had not been offended by the Congressman who dared to bring him a corrupt offer. Where was the General's sensibility?

According to his own account, a corrupt and scandalous proposal is made to him; the person who conveyed it, advises him to accept it; and yet that person still retains the friendship of Gen. Jackson, who is so tender of his character, that his name is carefully concealed, and reserved to be hereafter brought forward as a witness! A man, who, if he is a member of the House of Representatives, is *doubly infamous*, infamous for the advice which he gave, and infamous for his willingness to connive at the corruption of the body, . . . is the credible witness, by whom General Jackson stands ready to establish the corruption of men, whose characters are never questioned!<sup>17</sup>

Jackson had felt the necessity of explaining this point, and said inconsistently and evasively in his letter to Beverley that the Congressman had told him that he

was informed there was a great intrigue going on, and that it was right I should be informed of it; that he came as a friend, and let me receive the communication as I might, the friendly motives through which it was to be made he hoped would prevent any change of friendship or feeling in regard to him. To which I replied, from his high standing as a gentleman and member of Congress. . . . I could not suppose he would make any communication to me which he supposed was improper. Therefore, his motives being pure, let me think what I might of the communication, my feelings towards him would remain unaltered.

What chicanery! He claims by innuendo that Buchanan did bring a corrupt overture from Clay, "though he did use the term Mr. Clay's friends," and nevertheless Jackson was not disturbed. Nay, he seems to have *anticipated the awful nature* of Buchanan's communication! He betrays himself when he confesses that Buchanan communicated nothing he "supposed was improper." Is it conceivable that Buchanan would not have

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<sup>17</sup> *Niles' Register*, XXXII. 375-380. Much testimony disproving the corrupt bargain charge and showing Jackson's falseness is presented in Colton, *Clay*, I. 287-427, under the heading of "The Great Conspiracy."

realized it, even better than Jackson, if he had come as Clay's agent and brought a corrupt offer? If Jackson had really thought that Buchanan had come from Clay why did he not find out the truth by direct question of Buchanan instead of *presuming* Clay's implication and guilt? The General was an artist in obscurity and equivocation and Jefferson's equal in damning an opponent by subtle and false innuendo.

In answer to Clay's challenge, Jackson issued an "Address to the Public," July 18, at last naming Buchanan as the Congressman proposing "engagements" with Clay. He stated with growing assurance:

The conclusions and inferences from that conversation—the time, manner, and all the circumstances—satisfied my mind that it was not *unauthorized*. So I have thought, and so I still think. And yet, I again here repeat, that, in this supposition, I have possibly done Mr. Clay injustice. If he shall be able to sustain the averments he has made, and acquit himself of any participation and agency in the matter, I beg leave to assure him, that, so far from affording me pain, it will give me pleasure. . . . For the honor of that country, I should greatly prefer, that any inference I have made, may turn out to be ill founded.

Judge Jackson *assumes guilt* till innocence is proved, knowing well that it is as hard to disprove an unfounded slander as it is easy to make one.

Jackson now wrote Buchanan privately asking him to affirm this view of their conversation, throwing in a significant hint of intimidation: "I shall now, in reply to Mr. Clay's appeal, give my authority, *accompanied by the statement you made to Major John H. Eaton and to Mr. Kremer.*"<sup>18</sup> Buchanan, as a friend and expectant recipient of Jackson's patronage, would hardly dare or care to expose Jackson's "error" by a refutation; thus Jackson probably reasoned.

But Buchanan bitterly disappointed Jackson by

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<sup>18</sup> *Niles' Register*, XXXII. 350, 399, 400; Jackson to Buchanan, July 15, 1827, in G. T. Curtis, *James Buchanan*, I. 53, and Bassett, *op. cit.*, III. 373. My italics.

publishing a complete refutation of Jackson's story.<sup>19</sup> When Buchanan had learned from editor Duff Green, in 1826, that Jackson was basing his charge against Clay on the Buchanan-Jackson interview of December, 1824, he replied very positively to Green:

I had no authority from Mr. Clay or his friends to propose any terms to General Jackson, . . . nor did I make any such proposition. I trust I would be as incapable of becoming a messenger upon such an occasion, as it is known General Jackson would be to receive such a message.

I repeated the substance of this conversation to a few friends at Washington; one of whom must have communicated it to you. That person whoever he may be is entirely mistaken in supposing the subject of it to have been what you allege in your letter. I must therefore protest against bringing that conversation before the people. . . . I am clearly of opinion that whoever shall attempt to prove by direct evidence any corrupt bargain between Mr. C. and Mr. A. will fail. . . . General Jackson requires no such aid.<sup>20</sup>

One might suppose that Green would have apprised Jackson of this important letter and that it would have restrained him from his calumny in 1827. But not so.

Buchanan was genuinely astonished at Jackson's highly original and "extraordinary production" in 1827, and said in his public statement, of August 8, 1827, that he had gone to Jackson in December, 1824, with no overtures, and

solely as his friend upon my own individual responsibility and not as the agent of Mr. Clay. . . . Until I saw General Jackson's letter to Mr. Beverley of the 5th ult. and was informed by the

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<sup>19</sup> Buchanan consequently fell in Jackson's public estimation; and as late as 1845 the General advised Polk not to make Buchanan Secretary of State and harked back to this episode as showing the Pennsylvanian unworthy of confidence. "He did propose to fight them with their own weapons," he equivocally insisted. W. D. Jones, *Mirror of Modern Democracy*, 64, 65; cf. A. C. Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson*, II. 404; J. G. Harris to George Bancroft, September 13, 1887, in *Tyler's Historical and Genealogical Quarterly*, VII. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Buchanan to Green, October 16, 1826, in J. B. Moore, *Works of James Buchanan*, I. 219; Colton, *Clay*, I. 358, 359; *Niles' Register*, XXXIII. 21. Cf. Jackson to Green, August 13, 1827, in Bassett, *op. cit.*, III. 376-378; Buchanan to Green, July 16, 1827, in Moore, *op. cit.*, I. 262.

editor of the United States' Telegraph, that I was the person to whom he alluded, the conception never once entered my mind that he believed me to have been the agent of Mr. Clay or of his friends, or that I had intended to propose to him terms of any kind for them, or that he could have supposed me to be capable of expressing the 'opinion that it was right to fight such intriguers with their own weapons.' Such a supposition, had I entertained it, would have rendered me exceedingly unhappy, as there is no man upon earth, whose good opinion I more valued than that of General Jackson. He could not, I think, have received this impression, until after Mr. Clay and his friends had actually elected Mr. Adams president, and Mr. Adams had appointed Mr. Clay secretary of state. After those events had transpired, it may be readily conjectured in what manner my communication has led him into the mistake.<sup>21</sup>

Buchanan adds that he told Jackson what one Markley had said of rumored offers by Adams's friends to Clay, and says that this might have misled Jackson.

"I could not desire," Clay wrote a friend, "a stronger statement from Mr. Buchanan. The tables are completely turned upon the General. Instead of any intrigues on my part and that of my friends, they are altogether on the side of General Jackson and his friends." Webster wrote Clay:

I do not think that General Jackson can ever recover from the blow which he has received. Many persons think Buchanan's letter candid; I deem it otherwise. It seems to me to be labored very hard to protect the General, as far as he could, without injury to himself. Although the General's friends, this way, however, affect to consider Buchanan's letter as supporting the charge, it is possible the General himself, and the *Nashville Commentators* may think otherwise, and complain of Buchanan.<sup>22</sup>

Webster was right: the General did affect to think otherwise and did complain, *in private*. He wrote Kendall on September 4:

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<sup>21</sup> *Niles' Register*, XXXII. 415, 416. Cf. Buchanan to Jackson, August 10, 1827, in Moore, *op. cit.*, I. 269.

<sup>22</sup> Clay and Webster quoted in Parton, *Jackson*, III. 115, 116. Webster had written to Clay on July 24, 1827: "I have a suspicion that the respectable member of Congress is Mr. Buchanan. If this should turn out so, it will place him in an awkward situation, since, it seems, he did recommend a bargain with your friends, on the suspicion that such a bargain had been proposed to them on the part of the friends of Mr. Adams." *Works of Webster* (Nat. Ed.), XVI. 166.



I have seen Mr. Buchanan's address, it is such a production as surely I had not a right to expect from him; but we live in days of wonder. . . . It would be now only necessary for me to publish Major Eatons statement and Mr. Kreamers, contrast them with his, and it would appear that his recollection had materially failed him. Surely no one would believe that Mr. B. would go to my friends, make statements to them, to be communicated to me, and when they had refused—come to me himself, then make a different one; and that I should understand the statement made to me, as my friends did, that which was made to them. . . . This however is a subject of much delicacy, and is one upon which I shall fully deliberate before I act.<sup>23</sup>

But Jackson did not publicly complain in his own person; his ready agents did this invidious work. Far from being the simple, rash and precipitate man that the public considered him, Jackson was a man of astute and deep calculation, and one far from honest.

Buchanan never after this affair had full confidence in the Old Hero. When the Jacksonian slur on his veracity plagued Buchanan during his campaign for the presidency in 1856 he complained bitterly:

Although a patient & much enduring man, I have never had patience about 'the Bargain & Sale story.' So far as I am concerned, it all arose from the misapprehension by General Jackson of as innocent a conversation on the street, on my part, as I ever had with any person. I cannot charge myself with the slightest imprudence.

And furthermore:

There never was a more unfounded falsehood than that of my connection with the bargain, or alleged bargain. At the time I was a *young* member of Congress, not on terms of intimacy with either Jackson or Clay. It is true I admired both, & wished to see the one President & the other Secretary of State. . . . Had I known anything of the previous history of Jackson and Clay, I could not have believed it possible that the former would appoint the latter Secretary. A conversation of a few minutes with Jackson on the street on a cold & stormy day of December, fully related by me in 1827, & a meeting with Mr. Clay in Letcher's room, & a conversation perfectly harmless as stated [by Letcher, in Colton's *Clay*], have brought me into serious difficulties.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Jackson to Kendall, September 4, 1827, in Bassett, *op. cit.*, III. 381.

<sup>24</sup> Buchanan to W. B. Reed, September 8, July 7, 1856, in Moore, ed., *Works of Buchanan*, X. 85, 86, 91.

Though Buchanan's strained apology for Jackson's untruth has been eagerly accepted by historians to preserve the myth of Jackson's integrity,<sup>25</sup> Buchanan himself did not really believe that Jackson erred honestly or had really misapprehended what Buchanan said to him. Writing privately to Ingham, he utterly disparaged the possible effect of his mention of Markley to Jackson:

This conversation would be one link in the chain of testimony; but of itself, it is altogether incomplete. How Gen. Jackson could ever have believed I came to him as an emissary from Mr. Clay or his friends to make a corrupt bargain with him in their behalf I am at a loss to determine. . . . Although I continued to be upon terms of the strictest intimacy with Gen. Jackson whilst he continued at Washington, & have corresponded with him occasionally ever since, he has never once adverted to the subject. . . . I never could have suspected that he ever for a moment supposed me capable of becoming the agent in such a negotiation.<sup>26</sup>

Buchanan clearly never said to Jackson what the latter reports, and brought no offer from Clay. Jackson's falseness and retreat, while still slurring Clay, is apparent. It seems that Jackson *perverted* what Buchanan had said to Kremer and Eaton and used this to pad his account of what he would have it believed Bu-

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<sup>25</sup> Similar to Jackson's part in the "corrupt bargain" affair was his foul calumny of Calhoun in the "Rhea letter" episode of 1831. In the light of the Jackson Papers now published it is only too evident that the Rhea letter story was purely a fabrication, involving a clever forgery. For an early exposure of the fraud see James Schouler, "Monroe and the Rhea Letter," in *Magazine of American History*, XII. (1884), 308-322; Schouler, *Historical Briefs*, 97-120; Schouler, *History of the United States*, IV. 37, 38. On another phase of Jackson's unscrupulous intriguing and duplicity see the present writer's "Jackson, Anthony Butler, and Texas," in *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, XIII. 264-286. From Jackson's continual falsehood arose the euphemistic legend of his "bad memory."

<sup>26</sup> Buchanan to S. D. Ingham, July 12, 1827, in Moore, *op. cit.*, I. 260. There had been no need of bringing Markley in, for he was in fact a supporter of Jackson, and only made a "Clay-man" for the occasion. Colton, *Clay*, I. 355-358, quoting Markley's testimony in 1827, in which he denied having given Buchanan any definite or real information of "the friends of Mr. Clay moving in concert at the election."

chanan had said privately to himself. Jackson's hint of intimidation in his letter of July 15, 1827, calling upon Buchanan to testify for him, has been seen above. On receiving it, and after writing forthwith his own public statement, Buchanan wrote privately to Ingham:

I have not suffered my feelings to get the better of my judgment but have stated the truth in a calm and temperate manner. . . . You will perceive that General Jackson has cited Mr. Eaton as a witness. I have treated this part of his letter with great mildness. In a letter to me which I received the day before yesterday—the General intimates that George Kremer would confirm his statement. This letter is an imprudent & in my opinion an improper one. It is well it has fallen into the hands of a political friend.<sup>27</sup>

Buchanan apparently did not think that Kremer could or would bear Jackson out in his story.

We turn to what seems the master key—Kremer's affidavit of March 8, 1825, which Jackson would secretly place so much reliance on, and which, so far from warranting his charge made against Clay on receiving it, seems further to indicate that Jackson's misstatements were deliberate and malicious. Kremer wrote to Jackson:

Agreeably to your request, I communicate to you the substance of a conversation which I had early in January last with James Buchanan. He inquired of me when I had seen Genl Jackson, I replied not for some time; he then said there was great intrigue going on and that he thought it right to let me know it and that if he was known as I was to be the intimate friend of Genl Jackson he would inform the Genl of it and that he thought I ought to acquaint Genl Jackson, That the friends of Adams were making overtures to the friends of Clay to this effect, That if they the friends of Clay aided to elect Adams Clay should [be] Secretary of State and that he thought we were in great danger unless we would consent to *fight them with their own weapons . . . at least to get myself authorized to say that if Genl Jackson was elected President Mr. Adams should not be continued Secretary of State*. I told him that I could not do so That we must carry Genl Jackson on the ground of principle. . . . [Buchanan] repeated that it was necessary for the friends of Jackson to *fight them with their own weapons at least so far*

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<sup>27</sup> Buchanan to Ingham, August 9, 1827, in Moore, *op. cit.*, I. 268.

as to say whether Adams should remain Secretary of State or not; I will not be certain that I have used Mr. Buchanans own words. I am however certain that I have in Substance stated our conversation correctly. . . .

P.S. Mr. Buchanan stated that him and Mr. Clay had become great friends this winter, this he said as I thought to inforce on my mind the authority whence he had derived the information.<sup>28</sup>

It was on the slender basis of this, it seems, that Jackson presumed to erect his charge against Clay. Buchanan's *qualified* suggestion (as reported by Kremer, who does not pretend to be certain of Buchanan's language) that Jackson should "fight them with their own weppons *at least so far as*" to state that he would not support Adams, or at least to state whether he intended to retain Adams or not, may well reflect, if true, *on Buchanan*. But how is Clay involved? Does Kremer even insinuate that he thought Buchanan came as an agent from Clay or that he brought an offer? By no means. Buchanan merely offers some rather shady advice. From Kremer's postscript alone could Jackson have squeezed the idea that Buchanan came from Clay, and if he really did so it was a mere and utterly gratuitous assumption to suit his own purpose. Kremer's letter was written in reply to Jackson's queries and its postscript probably reflects the anxiety of the General to implicate Clay. Kremer's contemporary testimony, which was all that Clay and Adams could have desired for their vindication, Jackson dared not bring forth and publish. It would have given the lie to his assertion that Kremer understood Buchanan's remarks and visit in the same way that he pretends to have understood them.

Those who, after reflecting on the chicanery and in-

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<sup>28</sup> Kremer to Jackson, March 8, 1825, in Bassett, *op. cit.*, III. 281, 282. My italics. Bassett, overlooking the discrepancies between Jackson's and Kremer's statements, cites Kremer's affidavit as tending to uphold Jackson, as really supporting instead of merely being a tenuous pretext for Jackson's narrative. See Bassett's *Life of Jackson*.

sidiousness of Jackson's conduct in this affair, still cling to the belief that he had an honest conviction of Clay's corruption and of Clay's having made a corrupt offer to him through Buchanan must at least confess that the General displayed an inordinate readiness to pronounce Clay's corruption on the slightest of grounds—an anxiety to impeach and ruin a rival little reconcilable with his professions of disinterested patriotism and magnanimity. But Jackson's constant hypocrisy seems a malignant, ambitious and deceitful, rather than polite, variety, and his many "errors" something deeper than weaknesses of memory or of judgment.

Kremer's testimony was never published, and Eaton's weak public statement of September 18, 1827, might be counted a mere Jacksonian fiat had it contained anything to support Jackson. It was seemingly a last resort after the appearance of Buchanan's unexpected *exposé* had thrown the Jackson camp into a panic. An observer of this desperate affair wrote on August 31:

Buchanan's letter created a great hubbub; Eaton, who was not in Nashville when the letter arrived there, was sent for post haste, presumably to mend up B.'s tale; let them fall out among themselves, and the people may be able to see the truth that they are the intriguers and the slanderers of the best men in the nation.<sup>29</sup>

It seems that after his "deliberation" Jackson thought it prudent not to force an issue with Buchanan. Eaton's testimony therefore practically coincides with Buchanan's!

Eaton says that in August, 1826, he gave the following account to Duff Green of his conversation with Buchanan:

In January, 1825, . . . I was called upon by Mr. Buchanan of Pennsylvania. He said, it was pretty well understood, that overtures were making by the friends of Adams, on the subject of

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<sup>29</sup> Francis Johnson to James Barbour, August 31, 1827, in *New York Public Library Bulletin*, VI. 27.

cabinet appointments: That Jackson should fight them with their own weapons. He said, the opinion was, that Jackson would retain Adams, and that it was doing him injury.—That the General should state whom he would make Secretary of State, and desired that I would name it to him. My reply was, that I was satisfied General Jackson would say nothing on the subject.

He adds to this account:

In this application and interview, I felt that Mr. Buchanan was acting . . . for the success of General Jackson, and from a desire that nothing of stratagem and management should interpose to prevent the election of one for whom he felt more than common interest. . . . *He may have intended to present this as the idea and opinion of others, not his own. Such, indeed, may have been the case, though I cannot say I so understood him at the time.*<sup>30</sup>

Thus Jackson's calumnious tale fell completely. Not even Eaton would pretend to have understood Buchanan as bringing an "offer" and coming from Clay; he reminds the reader apologetically that Jackson's opinion was "given merely as matter of impression—nothing more." Yet, anxious to defend Jackson, he can assert with wilful optimism: "Between the statement of General Jackson and that submitted by Mr. Buchanan, I can perceive some differences; but they are principally verbal, and not material!"

Though fully refuted, Jackson, a man of rancor and would-be untarnished honor, persisted in his calumny. While he himself retired from public discussion, he made no apology for his "error" and his partisan publicists pronounced Buchanan a treacherous liar, leaving the public to think, if it chose, that Clay was guilty and that Buchanan had denied Jackson's tale from selfish shame and cowardice. Jackson had "magnanimously" declared prior to Buchanan's deposition, upon whose support he counted, that nothing would

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<sup>30</sup> Eaton's statement in *Nashville Republican*, September 18, 1827; *Niles' Register*, XXXIII. 94-96; Colton, *Clay*, I. 358. My italics. Cf. testimony of J. C. Isaacs of Tennessee in *Niles' Register*, XXXIII. 78.

please him more than the appearance of evidence exonerating Clay from his "irresistible inference," but he made now no retraction. As Clay pointed out in his "Vindication" in December, Buchanan's letter of exoneration proved Jackson's professed disinterested patriotism to be quite "gratuitous." It only mortified the Old Hero. Clay gave abundant proof of Jackson's hypocrisy and too justly said of him:

I did not participate in that just expectation, and therefore felt no disappointment. . . . Whatever other merits he may possess, I have not found among them . . . that of forbearing to indulge vindictive passions. . . . If it had been possible for him to render me an act of spontaneous justice by a frank and manly avowal of his error, the testimony now submitted to the public might have been unnecessary.

Jackson would never confess an error—which suggests that his damaging calumny against his rivals was no mere honest mistake. "It was inflicted as I must ever believe," said Clay in a speech in March, 1829, "for the double purpose of gratifying private resentment, and promoting personal ambition." It is a commentary on Jackson's pharisaical professions and his eagerness to find corruption in his rivals that he himself would seem, through Eaton and Lewis, to have done some "corrupt bargaining" in the campaign of 1828. The "understanding" in the summer of 1828 among the select few in New York that Van Buren would be Secretary of State under Jackson at least resembles that kind of preëlection agreement which was gratuitously imputed to Clay and Adams.<sup>31</sup>

Almost on his death-bed, Jackson renewed his slander in the Clay-Polk presidential contest, writing James Hamilton that

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<sup>31</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, III. 172, 173, 135, 136; Judge Breckinridge's speech at the Pittsburgh Whig Celebration, July 4, 1835, in *Baltimore Patriot*, August 5, 1835; cf. Edward Channing, *History of the United States*, V. 376.

Of the charges brought against both Mr. Adams and Mr. Clay at that time I formed my opinions as the country at large did—from facts and circumstances that were indisputable.<sup>32</sup>

But now (1844) he wrote Lewis privately a *strikingly different version of his specific charge* in the "corrupt bargain" matter. He said of Buchanan:

He showed a want of moral courage in the affair of the intrigue of Adams and Clay—did not do me justice in the exposé he then made, and I am sure about that time did believe there was a perfect understanding between Adams and Clay about the presidency and the Secretary of State. This I am sure of. But whether he viewed there was corruption in the case or not, I know not; but one thing I do know, that he wished me to combat them with their own weapons—that was, let my friends say if I was elected I would make Mr. Clay Secretary of State. This, to me, appeared deep corruption, and I repelled it, with that honest indignation as I thought it deserved.<sup>33</sup>

At last perforce the General is rather candid. Where is now the "corrupt offer" to him from Clay, or even from "Clay's friends," through Buchanan, of which he was once so positive when the event was presumably fresh in his mind? Now he comes over largely to Buchanan's and Clay's version of things: the corrupt suggestion is wholly on the side of Jackson's friends. Why did the General wait twenty years before resenting Buchanan's advice that Jackson make an overture to Clay's friends? Perhaps the danger involved in making to Clay's friends in 1825 the unscrupulous overture urged by Buchanan suggested to the wily General the *usefulness and feasibility* of such an overture having been secretly made to him by Clay and indignantly rejected by himself; and thus, perhaps, Jackson "found" or constructed such an overture upon the handy basis of Buchanan's conversations with him, Kremer and Eaton. It was, then, the undoing of this plot that at last awakened Jackson's indignation

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<sup>32</sup> Jackson to Hamilton, May 3, 1844, in *Niles' Register*, LXVI. 247.

<sup>33</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, III. 116.



towards the unhelpful Buchanan, long conveniently postponed.

Buchanan could not appreciate Jackson's ways, and regretted, only in less degree than Clay, the fatal acceptance of the Secretaryship by Clay which had given Jackson his handle for devastating slander; in 1844 he wrote Governor Letcher:

It was a most unfortunate day for the country, Mr. Clay & all of us, when he accepted the office of Secretary of State. To be sure there was nothing criminal in it; but it was worse . . . a great blunder. Had it not been for this, he would in all probability now have been in retirement after having been President for eight years; and friends like you & myself who ought to have stood together through life would not have been separated.<sup>34</sup>

Jackson was a consummate actor. His contemporaries in general took him for a symbol of frankness and integrity, but it is not to be supposed that those ill-used by him shared in this callow hero-worship. G. P. A. Healy relates that after painting Jackson on his death-bed he visited Clay, who said to him: "Jackson during his lifetime, was held up as a sort of hero; now that he is dead his admirers want to make him out a saint. Do you think he was sincere?" Healy replied: "I have just come from his death-bed, and if General Jackson was not sincere, then I do not know the meaning of the word." Clay shot up a keen look but merely observed: "I see that you, like all who approach that man, were fascinated by him."<sup>35</sup> Jackson stands out more and more as the most remarkable and fascinating man of the period—the American Napoleon, combining in his character indomitable energy and ambition with amazing craft and boldness.

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<sup>34</sup> Buchanan to Letcher, July 27, 1844, in Moore, *op. cit.*, VI. 59-65.

<sup>35</sup> G. P. A. Healy, "Reminiscences of a Portrait Painter," in *North American Review*, CLI. 586.