

James Buchanan and Public Office

An Appraisal

ONE of the most perplexing characteristics of James Buchanan's long and varied career as a public servant was his attitude toward public office. From 1814 when he was first elected to the Pennsylvania legislature until the end of his Presidential term in 1861, he had more experiences in state and national government than most of his contemporaries. Yet in these prime years of his life he professed to an almost negative attitude toward public office. Repeatedly he refused to be a candidate, but, with only a few exceptions, accepted the nomination or appointment when it was extended. Then, while in office, he regularly reminded his constituents and friends of his plans to retire from all public service at the completion of the then-current term and to return to the practice of law for which he had been educated. Buchanan, as a man who made politics his life's work, reveals on the record the intensity of his loyalty to his party and country on the one hand and a lack of desire to seek office on the other.

James Buchanan's first experience as a public servant came in October, 1814, when he was elected as a Federalist to the Pennsylvania legislature to represent Lancaster County.¹ The following year he was re-elected, but at the end of this second term he retired to practice law; this was the first of his many "retirements" from politics. During the next four years he remained out of office, practicing law successfully, as his sizable professional income clearly reflects.²

¹ It appears that Buchanan hoped to use this office as a means of furthering his law career; a letter from his father, dated Jan. 20, 1815, intimates this: "I am glad to find you are well pleased at being a member of the Legislature. Perhaps it may have the effect you mention, that of increasing your business hereafter." George Ticknor Curtis, *Life of James Buchanan, Fifteenth President of the United States* (New York, 1883), I, 11.

² There is a memorandum of his annual professional income for the years 1813 to 1829 in *ibid.*, 15 (note).

However, in 1820 he was elected to represent Lancaster, York, and Dauphin counties in the House of Representatives and took his seat on December 3, 1821. First as a Federalist and then as a Jacksonian Democrat, he served for ten years; this phase of his career was climaxed in 1829 with his appointment as chairman of the Judiciary Committee.

Just before the end of his fifth term as Congressman, some of Buchanan's Pennsylvania friends became actively interested in nominating him for the Vice-Presidency in 1832 on a ticket with President Andrew Jackson. In reply to their letter on this subject, Buchanan set a course which he was to follow almost to the letter on many occasions during the next three decades. After thanking them for their interest and claiming that their suggestions were "wholly unexpected," he wrote³:

I cannot flatter myself for a single moment, that the people of the State will respond to a nomination which I feel has been dictated in a great degree by personal friendship; & I shall retire to private life, after the close of the present session without casting one lingering look behind. As a private citizen I shall always remember with the deepest sensibility the many favors which I have received from the people of the District whom I have so long represented, perfectly convinced that they have already bestowed upon me quite as many honors as I have ever deserved.

His patent reaction to a public draft had become firmly crystallized even at this early date: first thank his friends for their interest and deny any previous knowledge of what was being planned, then refuse the draft because of well-laid plans for an immediate retirement from public office, next attribute all past successes to his constituency, and finally humbly admit that the people had already given him more than he rightfully deserved.⁴

Despite this courteous rejection, Buchanan's Pennsylvania supporters continued to work on his behalf. In March, 1831, a meeting

³ Buchanan to George Plitt, Feb. 18, 1831. Plitt was a close friend from Philadelphia. John Bassett Moore, ed., *The Works of James Buchanan* . . . (Philadelphia, 1908-1911), II, 166-167.

⁴ In justice to Buchanan, however, it should be noted that his intent to retire in 1831 was motivated by the desire to re-establish his professional income, it having fallen to somewhat below \$2,000 a year. Curtis, I, 123.

was held at Lancaster at which he was formally nominated for Vice-President, without his consent. Buchanan's brother George, writing from Pittsburgh, observed that the idea of the Lancaster meeting "seems to take very well" and that meetings for the same purpose were being proposed in Washington and Allegheny counties.⁵ About a month later he wrote again on the same subject, advising his brother that "in every county in which I have been, your nomination for the V. Py. is very popular. In Fayette & Washington, there will scarcely be a division of sentiment."⁶ Because some people thought it proper to delay any further similar actions, no more meetings were planned in Western Pennsylvania until after the regular Democratic party meetings that summer. However, a meeting of Jackson supporters was held at Williamsport in June at which, as George Buchanan put it, "There can be no doubt that you were the Pennsylvanian to whom the resolution respecting the Vice-Presidency was intended to point."⁷

In the meantime, and despite his many claims that he was no longer interested in public office, Buchanan was approached by the Jackson Administration, through Major John H. Eaton, with an invitation to become Minister to Russia.⁸ Buchanan's first reaction was typical of his approach to such requests—he was not sure he could serve adequately in the office, in this instance because of his ignorance of French, the language of diplomacy. In addition, he claimed he had "much business now on hand which I could not immediately leave without doing serious injury to individuals who have confided in me."⁹ But after Jackson promised that he would have

⁵ George W. Buchanan to Buchanan, Mar. 23, 1831. George Buchanan was United States District Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania at this time. *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶ G. W. Buchanan to Buchanan, Apr. 29, 1831, Moore, II, 172-173.

⁷ G. W. Buchanan to Buchanan, June 15, 1831, Curtis, I, 126-127.

⁸ J. H. Eaton to Buchanan, May 31, 1831, Moore, II, 173.

⁹ Buchanan to Eaton, June 4, 1831, *ibid.*, 173-174. Curtis mentions that, in addition to these obstacles, Buchanan's mother expressed some objection to her son's accepting this appointment. On Oct. 21, [1831], she wrote: "Would it not be practicable, even now, to decline its acceptance? Your political career has been of that description which ought to gratify your ambition; and as to pecuniary matters, they are no object to you. If you can, consistently with the character of a gentleman and a man of honor, decline, how great a gratification it would be to me." Curtis, I, 134. His mother was sixty-five years of age at the time, which may well have been the reason for her request. Mrs. Buchanan subsequently died on May 14, 1833, while her son was on duty in St. Petersburg.

ample time to arrange his personal affairs and to remedy the language difficulty, Buchanan accepted the offer.¹⁰

During the fourteen months while he was in Russia, Buchanan wrote numerous official and private letters. In several of these he made special reference to his plans for the future. Writing in May, 1833, to his friend John B. Sterigere, who had suggested that Buchanan could be elected to the Senate, he remarked, "Indeed I have an impression that my public career is drawing near its close, & I can assure you this feeling does not cost me a single pang." In view of this anticipated retirement, he still had to choose a permanent place to practice his profession, and confessed that "To recommence the practice of the law in Lancaster would not be very agreeable." Then he told his friend, "I would at once go either to New York or Baltimore, & even if I should ever desire to rise to political distinction, I believe I could do it sooner in the latter place than in any part of Pennsylvania."¹¹ Quite clearly Buchanan had not yet firmly made up his mind about either his personal or political future. Just before leaving St. Petersburg to return to America, Buchanan wrote another revealing letter, this time to his close friend George G. Leiper, which reflects his mood in 1833¹²:

I think it more than probable that my political life is drawing to a close & I confess I look upon the prospect without regret. Office is not necessary for my happiness. . . . Whoever embarks on the stormy ocean of politicks must calculate to make a shipwreck of contentment & tranquillity. I have served the old hero [*Andrew Jackson*] faithfully & zealously; & he has done more for me than I could have expected.

This apparently settled the matter of his political future—but only for the moment.

¹⁰ Buchanan to Eaton, June 12, 1831, Moore, II, 175. In September, Buchanan had occasion to write to President Jackson about Pennsylvania's support of the President. In this letter he made an interesting statement about the Vice-Presidency: "Now I have no wish to be a candidate for the Vice Presidency, on the contrary my nomination was got up without my consent & it is my intention to decline but I desire to do it at such a time & in such a manner as will be entirely agreeable to yourself. I think that no man ought to hold that office but one of mature age who has obtained the confidence of the American people by distinguished public services. It ought to be the crowning glory—the last honor conferred upon any man—unless he should afterwards be elevated to the Presidency. In short he ought to be next in the confidence of the people to the President himself. I have not the vanity for one moment to suppose myself to be such a character." Buchanan to Jackson, Sept. 10, 1831, *ibid.*, 177-179.

¹¹ Buchanan to John B. Sterigere, May 19, 1833, *ibid.*, 331-334.

¹² Buchanan to George G. Leiper, July 3, 1833, *ibid.*, 366-368.

Upon arriving in the United States in November, 1833, Buchanan went to Lancaster where he spent most of the following year. Appropriately, he arrived in the Keystone State at a time when Jacksonian Pennsylvanians were searching for an eligible Vice-Presidential prospect from their state. To many of his friends Buchanan was the man. Writing to Colonel James Page in January, 1834, Buchanan confessed that he was not only astonished and "agreeably disappointed" with these recent events, but that he had not recognized the high esteem in which he was held by the Democratic members of the legislature. "Many, & those the most influential, without reserve, told me that Pennsylvania *must* have the Vice President & if their opinions had sufficient influence I should be nominated for that office by the National Convention." Buchanan further advised his friend that when "Mr. Van Buren & myself were toasted together the applause was louder & more general than on the reception of any other toast."¹³

Since the Presidential election would not be held until November, 1836, a political opportunity at a lower level offered itself to Buchanan early in 1834. Senator William Wilkins of Pennsylvania was being considered by President Jackson for appointment as Minister to Russia. This offered Buchanan an acceptable possibility for returning to the center of the American political stage. It is difficult to assess his feelings about the Senate at the moment, but in writing to Colonel Page, Buchanan frankly admitted, "I must be greatly mistaken if in that event I should not be elected to the Senate without difficulty."¹⁴ On January 18, writing to President Jackson, Buchanan elaborated on his being "most agreeably disappointed" in regard to his standing in the Keystone State and repeated his feelings about the Senate—"If the election for Senator were now to take place I think I should succeed without difficulty."¹⁵

He did not have long to wait, for on December 6, 1834, the state legislature, after four ballots, chose him to complete the unexpired portion of Wilkins' term. On being notified of his election, he thanked the legislators and promised to "justify, by my conduct, the

¹³ Buchanan to Col. James Page, Jan. 17, 1834, *ibid.*, 397.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Buchanan to Jackson, Jan. 18, 1834, *ibid.*, 398. Buchanan alluded to the Vice-Presidency in this letter by insisting, "I shall never suffer my name to be used unless it can be done in consistency with the strength & harmony of the Republican party upon which I am convinced that the permanence & prosperity of our Institutions, in a great degree, depend."

generous confidence which you have thus reposed" in "the only public station I desire to occupy."¹⁶ From this it would seem that Buchanan looked on himself more as a legislator than as an administrator or executive.

For the next ten years Buchanan served as Senator from Pennsylvania, and was a staunch supporter of Jacksonian Democratic principles and policies. From time to time his name was mentioned as a likely candidate for the Vice-Presidency and, on occasion, for the Presidency. But his correspondence in this period reveals his satisfaction with his work as Senator and the small attraction executive office had for him. Early in 1839, without his knowledge, his name was placed at the masthead of the Berwick, Pennsylvania, *Sentinel* as its candidate for the Vice-Presidency. When asked if he would consent to this action, Buchanan cordially thanked his supporters in that district, but declined the honor. Three circumstances made this declination necessary: (1) his sense of duty toward the Democratic Party, (2) his preference for his seat in the Senate, and (3) his desire to promote harmony among all the states, this last to be accomplished, he believed, by strict adherence to the practice of selecting the party's Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates from "different grand divisions of the Union."¹⁷

In December, 1839, Buchanan had another and more direct means for showing his preference for the legislative rather than the executive branch. When Attorney General Felix Grundy resigned, Martin Van Buren promptly offered Buchanan the opportunity to become a member of his Cabinet. In this invitation Van Buren mentioned Buchanan's satisfaction with his Senatorial seat, but still felt it was his duty to extend the offer.¹⁸ Buchanan either must have anticipated the President's plans or had earlier settled in his own mind what he would do in such an event as this, for unhesitatingly he expressed his preference for the Senate. He felt he could do more for the principles and program of the Administration in the Senate than in an executive office, "which, from its nature, would necessarily withdraw me, in a great degree, from the general politics of the country, and again sub-

¹⁶ Buchanan to Jacob Kern and others, members of the legislature of Pennsylvania, Dec. 22, 1834, Curtis, I, 229-231.

¹⁷ Buchanan to Levi L. Tate, Mar. 26, 1839, Moore, IV, 116.

¹⁸ Van Buren to Buchanan, Dec. 27, 1839, *ibid.*, 124.

ject me to the labors of the profession.”¹⁹ While these two examples do not necessarily make a definitive case, they do show the direction of Buchanan’s interests and efforts in the 1830’s.

During the Whig administrations of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler, Buchanan continued to serve with distinction in the Senate. Significantly, he was again approached on several occasions by persons eager to advance him as a Democratic candidate for one of the nation’s two highest executive offices. In September, 1841, when a newspaper editor asked permission to nominate him for the Presidency in 1844, Buchanan drew back and seemed to reprimand his correspondent: “It is yet too soon to agitate this question in the Public Journals; and any premature movement would only injure the individual it was intended to benefit.” And then, as if he suddenly realized that he was showing an uncharacteristic interest in the office, he quickly added, “Besides I have no ambitious longings on this subject. Let events take their course. . . .”²⁰ Later that winter some Pennsylvania Democrats expressed an interest in Buchanan as their favorite-son candidate for the Presidency. In a letter to George G. Leiper, in which he attempted to explain his position on this point, Buchanan observed, “I think there never was a man whose name had been mentioned for the Presidency who took the subject less to heart than myself.” In this same letter, he made a statement which, in part at least, explains his attitude toward public office, particularly the Presidency; on more than one occasion he used it as his guide: “If a candidate cannot start with the acknowledged strength of his own State in his support, he had better not start at all. I have always considered it [*the Presidency*] an office ‘neither to be sought nor declined’; and I shall ever act upon this principle.”²¹ From this, one would expect Buchanan never to seek the nomination actively, but, by the same token, never to refuse it once tendered.

Undoubtedly the issue of Buchanan’s willingness to become an active candidate for the Presidency came to a head early in 1843 when the Pennsylvania legislature re-elected him for another term as United States Senator. In notifying him of their action, the legislature’s Democratic members again asked permission to present his

¹⁹ Buchanan to Van Buren, Dec. 28, 1839, Curtis, I, 452-453.

²⁰ Buchanan to William Flinn, Jr., Sept. 5, 1841, Moore, V, 72-73.

²¹ Buchanan to Leiper, May 22, 1842, *ibid.*, 254-255.

name as a favorite-son candidate in the 1844 nominating convention. Again Buchanan declared himself totally unprepared for "such an annunciation," explaining he had never received "the slightest intimation of their intention" until after their letter to him had been signed. In one of the most complete statements Buchanan ever made relative to public office, he wrote to these friends:

Both principle and a becoming sense of the merit of others have hitherto prevented me from taking any, even the least part, in promoting my own elevation to the Presidency. I have no ambitious longings to gratify, conscious as I am that I have already received more of the offices & honors of my Country than I have ever deserved. If I know my own heart, I should most freely resign any pretensions which the partiality of friends has set up for me, if by this I could purchase harmony & unanimity in the selection of a Democratic candidate. . . . I am deeply convinced that the highest office under Heaven ought to be the voluntary gift of the only free people upon earth. No man can justly claim it from the people as a matter of right.

Working from this, Buchanan further described the Presidency as the people's "own spontaneous gift to the most worthy," and he believed any person who manipulated men and events to his own advantage in order to be nominated would be unworthy of that honor. Then, as instructions to the "Democracy of Pennsylvania," he advised that should they "resolve to offer my name to the National Convention as a candidate for the Presidency . . . I feel that I ought not to counteract their wishes. Should they determine differently, this will not be to me a cause of the slightest mortification." Always the party man, Buchanan concluded this letter with a typical politician's stand. Because there was an apparent tendency among some of his supporters to look on him as the only possible candidate for the nation's highest office, he warned that "No good Democrat . . . ought to suffer his feelings to become so enlisted in favor of any one candidate, that he could not yield his cheerful & cordial support to any other who may be nominated by the National Convention."²²

During the next eleven months Buchanan was an active candidate for the nomination—active in the sense that he allowed his friends to keep his name before the public. By the same token, however, Pennsylvania's favorite son insisted without qualification that he had

²² Buchanan to B. Crispen, H. B. Wright, and other members of the Democratic Party in the legislature of Pennsylvania, Feb. 2, 1843, *ibid.*, 415-417.

"totally abstained from all personal efforts to promote my own success." Unfortunately for the well-laid plans of the Pennsylvanians, Martin Van Buren was making an all-out effort to win the nomination and by the end of 1843 had the pledged support of a majority of the delegates. Buchanan, in the face of this, decided officially to withdraw his name, without consulting anyone. He feared a conflict of opinions that would be embarrassing, and justified his act by an "anxious desire to drive discord from the ranks of the party, and secure the ascendancy of democratic principles."²³ Buchanan unquestionably made his decision only after a long and serious study of the political situation, especially that in Pennsylvania. More than anything, he wanted to keep Pennsylvania from being placed in a "false position" at the convention by having to support him when the tide was so obviously moving in the direction of Van Buren. Even though Van Buren was neither Buchanan's first nor second choice for the nomination, he recognized he had no alternative but to follow the will of the party as he interpreted it.²⁴

Although Van Buren appeared to have an open field to the nomination throughout the first months of 1844, there were some indications that he too might withdraw. This posed another problem for Buchanan. If Van Buren withdrew, Buchanan thought he might, "with honor," allow Pennsylvania to resume its support of his candidacy; however, should Van Buren persist in seeking the nomination, Buchanan felt positive he could not defeat the former President.²⁵ Eventually, when two Pennsylvania delegates asked instructions in the event of a Van Buren withdrawal, he gave them permission to present his name "as a candidate" to the convention if they thought such a course was proper.²⁶ Although Van Buren did not withdraw until after the eighth ballot, when it became clear he could not win the two-thirds vote necessary for nomination, there were still a few

²³ "Mr. Buchanan and the Presidency," *Niles' National Register*, Dec. 30, 1843, taken from *Lancaster Intelligencer*. He withdrew on Dec. 14.

²⁴ Buchanan to J. Glancy Jones, Jan. 2, 1844. On his withdrawal, Buchanan wrote further to Jones, "It was a duty which I owed to my party, to my friends . . . and to myself, to yield to the will of the majority." Moore, XI, 471-472.

²⁵ Buchanan to Cornelia (Mrs. James J.) Roosevelt, May 13, 1844. Here Buchanan frankly told Mrs. Roosevelt, "if I should ever run for the Presidency, I would like to have an open field & a fair start." *Ibid.*, VI, 1-3.

²⁶ Buchanan to Gen. Henry D. Foster and Benjamin H. Brewster, May 25, 1844, *ibid.*, 4. The convention began its work at Baltimore on May 27.

scattered votes cast for Buchanan, which were, of course, in contradiction to his wishes. Yet when writing to Governor Robert P. Letcher of Kentucky following the convention (and his words belie his actions between December and May), he insisted that after his original withdrawal he never thought of the Presidency—"The very last thing I desired was to be the candidate."²⁷ Buchanan had obviously been caught in an awkward chain of events, made even more complicated with the eventual nomination of James K. Polk. He was trying to be both a party man and a candidate at the same time.

With Polk's election, the Democratic Party was in power again after four years. Buchanan was to play a leading role in the new administration. Shortly before taking office, Polk appointed Buchanan Secretary of State,²⁸ and, as a condition to the appointment, required that any member of his Cabinet who should become a candidate for either the Presidency or Vice-Presidency would have to resign from office. In accepting the appointment, Buchanan made several pertinent comments on the condition imposed by Polk. First, he conceded that patriotism and policy, as well as the success of the Democratic Party and the Polk Administration, required that "we should have repose from the strife of making Presidents." But this, according to Buchanan, should not necessarily require that every Cabinet member ostracize himself politically. He could not commit himself to such an outright pledge, for as he put it, "I do not know that I shall ever desire to be a Candidate for the Presidency." Even though he had never "strongly felt such an inclination," he certainly could not be held responsible for the action of county meetings which might present his name without his consent or even his knowledge. In all frankness, he announced to Polk, "I cannot proclaim to the world that in no contingency shall I be a Candidate for the Presidency in 1848." After being so forthright, almost insistent, he altered his course and steered toward a compromise²⁹:

I can answer for myself that as I have never yet raised a finger or stirred a step, towards the attainment of this station [*the Presidency*]; so I never shall make any personal exertions for that purpose, without your express permission, so long as I may remain a member of your Cabinet. If however,

²⁷ Buchanan to Hon. Robert P. Letcher, July 27, 1844, *ibid.*, 63-65.

²⁸ Polk to Buchanan, Feb. 17, 1845, *ibid.*, 110-111.

²⁹ Buchanan to Polk, Feb. 18, 1845, *ibid.*, 111-112.

unexpectedly to myself, the people should . . . present me as their candidate, I cannot declare in advance that I would not accede to their wishes; but in that event I would retire from your Cabinet unless you should desire me to remain.

With this, Buchanan again entered the executive branch of government to serve for the next four years.

Among the many personal letters he wrote during his tenure as Secretary of State, one in 1847 demonstrates how completely Buchanan had accepted Polk's condition on appointment. When he was advised that his name had been proposed "for the first office in the gift of the people" by a newspaper editor, Buchanan promptly decried this as unwanted. He disclaimed any "ambitious aspirations" for the Presidency and only hoped that the candidate selected by the Democratic Party in 1848 would be the strongest man available, and therefore best able to win.³⁰ Regardless of any personal ambitions, Buchanan once again showed his hand as a politician interested more in the victory of the party than of any individual.

Because Lewis Cass had been nominated by the Democrats for the Presidency in 1848,³¹ Buchanan fully expected to be retired from public office the following March. At no other time in his life did he show such devotion to "retirement." When he learned that "Wheatland," an attractive home and property outside Lancaster, was available for purchase, he wrote to its owner, "As I intend, in any event, to retire from public life on the 4th of March next, I should be pleased to become the purchaser."³² A month later he qualified his position when he wrote, "It is my fixed determination to retire to private life, at least for a season, at the close of the present adminis-

³⁰ Buchanan to C. B. Cotter, Sept. 4, 1847. This letter is marked "Private & Confidential." *Ibid.*, VII, 409.

³¹ At the Baltimore Convention, beginning on May 22, 1848, Buchanan's name was entered in nomination; he received fifty-five votes on the first ballot, the largest of his totals in the four ballots cast. Later he wrote that he had no desire to win the nomination: "I bore my defeat at Baltimore with perfect resignation." Buchanan to Robert Tyler, July 13, 1848, *ibid.*, XI, 478-479.

³² Buchanan to Hon. William M. Meredith, June 12, 1848, Curtis, II, 2-3. Meredith, a leading Philadelphia lawyer, later became Secretary of the Treasury in President Zachary Taylor's Cabinet. With reference to his choice of Pennsylvania as his place of residence, Buchanan wrote, "It is a duty which I owe to the party in Pennsylvania to return there; but if I were to leave that State Washington should be my place of residence." Buchanan to Hon. George Bancroft, Dec. 11, 1848, Moore, XI, 480-481.

tration." To guarantee that his Pennsylvania supporters understood these plans, he wrote several letters to the effect that he would not be a candidate either for governor of the Commonwealth or for United States Senator. Without giving any concrete reasons, he simply indicated that "my own strong inclination impels me to the shades of private life. I am sick and tired of my present situation."³³

With only a few more months to serve as Secretary of State, Buchanan began to show his happiness at his anticipated departure from the public scene. In a letter to his good friend George Bancroft, Minister to Great Britain, he wrote: "We who are about to retire are 'as merry as crickets.' We neither feel regret nor despondency. We are mortified alone from public considerations." In this same letter with its light touch Buchanan revealed his dissatisfaction with the work of the past four years: "The State Department has never been a pleasant situation for me, though it might have been so, and personally I long to enjoy the privilege of being once more a private citizen."³⁴

As might be expected, by the summer of 1849 after he had left office, Buchanan was lighthearted and almost carefree, most unusual for him. To Isaac Toucey, a close political friend, he wrote, "I can say in all sincerity that I am contented & even happy in my retirement. Since I left Washington, I have led a more idle & worthless life than at any former period."³⁵ Again in this same vein but a little later, he wrote to George Bancroft, "I . . . may truly say that I am contented and happy. I do not render myself miserable by ambitious longings and would not willingly, even if I could, return to the Senate."³⁶

Buchanan had completed a phase in his political career—he had made a good name for himself, had been twice nominated for the Presidency, and had served his state and country well. Beginning in 1851, he uncharacteristically embarked on a conscious effort to win the "highest office in the command of the people," despite many familiar statements to the contrary. His positive course of action became clear in 1852 when he felt he was ready and qualified for the nomination and believed that Pennsylvania was willing to tender him the honor.

³³ Buchanan to Robert Tyler, July 13, 1848, *ibid.*, 478-479.

³⁴ Buchanan to Bancroft, Dec. 18, 1848, *ibid.*, 481-482.

³⁵ Buchanan to Hon. Isaac Toucey, June 1, 1849, *ibid.*, VIII, 362-363.

³⁶ Buchanan to Bancroft, June 29, 1849, *ibid.*, XI, 487-489.

From late 1851 until after the Democratic National Convention of 1852, Buchanan's correspondence reveals a rather carefully planned effort on his part to become the Chief Executive. This first comes to light when, in a letter of December, 1851, to his good friend Cave Johnson of Tennessee, he began a systematic evaluation of his Presidential chances in several eastern and southern states. He expected to do well in Maine and Connecticut, but only fair elsewhere in New England, and noted that he was stronger in Pennsylvania than at any other time in his career. But, though he was working harder than ever toward the goal, he assured Johnson that "I shall do my duty faithfully to myself & my friends; but am determined not to lose a night's rest or a meal's victuals, let the result be what it may."³⁷ By the end of the year he was writing confidential letters to his closest supporters in an effort to assess his chances. Again to Cave Johnson, he claimed: "My own prospects, unless I am greatly deceived, never were so bright, & if I am to believe information from Washington, are daily growing brighter. This strength is in great part derived from the general impression that I am strong with all branches of the Southern Democracy." But still there were many problems to which solutions had to be found. Tennessee threatened to support "another man," which would be a severe blow to his chances; he realized that "Should it go against me, this may prove decisive of my fate." Added to this and compounding the problem, Pennsylvania was becoming "very close," primarily because of the tariff question.³⁸

Buchanan continued to weigh his Presidential possibilities in the various states right up to the Democratic Convention in June, 1852. He worried about the support he could expect from his home city and county of Lancaster where many of his friends were hard at work on his behalf. Despite having sufficient money to do a good job, his home-town supporters could not make any confident predictions in his favor. Things brightened somewhat in February when he felt sure the Virginia delegation was for him, and he expected Tennessee's delegates also to support him. But by March the political winds had

³⁷ Buchanan to Hon. Cave Johnson, Dec. 3, 1851, *ibid.*, VIII, 425-427. He must have been working at top speed at this particular period, for he wrote to his niece, "My life is now one of great labor . . ."; but then to add to the paradox which characterizes so much of Buchanan the man, he added, ". . . but I am philosopher enough not to be very anxious." Buchanan to Miss Harriet Lane, Dec. 12, 1851, *ibid.*, 427-428.

³⁸ Buchanan to Cave Johnson, Dec. 22, 1851, *ibid.*, 428-430.

shifted and he was not as positive as he had been. There was some question now of Virginia's allegiance. Buchanan recognized that "its decision may determine my fate. With Virginia in my favor I shall be nominated, if against me the result is extremely doubtful."³⁹ To counterbalance this, Buchanan was certain the great majority of his fellow Pennsylvanians were aroused not only on his own behalf, but also to win the nomination for that state.

By March 30, Buchanan had reached an impasse in his assessment. He knew he had to have more friends in Washington, "even if we have to send them there," and he felt he had to come to an agreement with "the Van Burens." Both problems were proving difficult to solve. Even more ominous was the turn events had taken in Virginia and Tennessee, where the state conventions had met and failed to instruct their delegates as to which candidate to support. Buchanan was sure that because of this his ambitions had now "been left open for all the misrepresentations of the friends of other candidates."⁴⁰ Yet he was overjoyed at having carried the Pennsylvania delegation. There were many signs both favorable and unfavorable for his Presidential future; at best his chances were, as he described them, only "fair."

The Democrats again met in Baltimore in June, 1852, with four leading candidates, Lewis Cass, Stephen A. Douglas, William L. Marcy, and Buchanan. When, after forty-eight ballots, none of these men had been able to poll the necessary two-thirds vote, the nomination went to Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire. James Buchanan's most determined bid for the Presidency had fallen short. Yet his reaction was that of a man quite satisfied to accept his party's decision—"I can say, with the most sincere truth, that I feel far more deeply the disappointment of my friends than my own disappointment. This has not, and will not, cost me a single pang."⁴¹ By

³⁹ Buchanan to Hon. Henry A. Wise, Mar. 18, 1852, *ibid.*, 441-442.

⁴⁰ Buchanan to Cave Johnson, Mar. 30, 1852. As if he was getting tired of all that had been going on during the previous four months, he told Johnson: "If nominated, very well; if not, with the blessings of Providence, I may look forward to a few years of peace & tranquillity before 'shuffling off this mortal coil.' I shall then write a book & review some of the old scenes through which I have passed." *Ibid.*, 447-449.

⁴¹ There had been some talk of nominating him for the Vice-Presidency, but Buchanan announced that he "*would most assuredly decline*. It is the very last office under the Government I would desire to hold, and it would be no honor bestowed on good old Pennsylvania to have it conferred upon one of her sons." Buchanan to Hon. David R. Porter, June 4, 1852, Curtis, II, 39.

his standards, he had received a fair trial and had been fairly defeated.

Because his party had not nominated him for the Presidency, Buchanan believed that the time was now right to announce his retirement from politics; this he did in rather final terms: "After a long and stormy public life, I shall go into final retirement without regret, and with a perfect consciousness that I have done my duty faithfully to my country in all the public situations in which I have been placed." Yet, in almost the same breath, he again qualified his "retirement" to mean only that he would never hold another office. He fully intended to "feel and take an interest in favor of the Democratic cause."⁴²

Despite all the time and effort he had expended in seeking the nomination, Buchanan's correspondence of late June and July, 1852, reveals no disappointment at his defeat. In writing to Pierce he expressed his deep relief at not being nominated; the Presidency, "although a crown of honor far more glorious than that of any monarch in Christendom," was really a "crown of thorns." And, again to Pierce, Buchanan made such a clear-cut statement on the Presidency that one must doubt the sincerity of his earlier actions—and, indeed, of this statement: "My friends having failed in obtaining that [*the nomination*] for me which I never anxiously desired, I heartily rejoice in your success."⁴³ Later, just before the election of 1856, Buchanan divulged a very different attitude when he wrote to John Slidell, "No desire lurks in my bosom to become President. This you may think strange, knowing that I was anxious to be nominated by the last Baltimore Convention, if this could have been accomplished upon honorable principles."⁴⁴

After this spate of letters during the weeks immediately following the convention, references to his political future became somewhat less frequent and more philosophical. Because the anxiety over the nomination was ended and because he was content with the outcome

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Buchanan to Pierce, June 21, 1852, Moore, VIII, 453. In a letter to Cave Johnson written three days later, Buchanan reiterated this attitude: "I never felt any longing or anxious desire to be the President. . . . Personally, I am entirely satisfied with the result." Curtis, II, 40-41. For another expression of this same attitude, see Buchanan to Nahum Capen, June 26, 1852, Moore, VIII, 456.

⁴⁴ Buchanan to Hon. John Slidell, Dec. 28, 1855, *ibid.*, IX, 485-487.

(although he admitted he would have faced the "fearful" responsibilities of the Presidency with "cheerful confidence"), Buchanan now looked forward to the future as a private citizen. As he put it in a letter to Miss Eliza Watterston, "Tranquillity and retirement are congenial with my natural disposition; and with the blessings of Providence, I now look forward to a few years of peace and comparative quiet before my final account, after a long and stormy public career."⁴⁵ With this pronouncement, Buchanan marked the end of his most determined bid to win the Presidential nomination. But his political career was far from over. He was twice to serve his country for protracted periods between 1853 and 1861, first as Minister to England and then as President.⁴⁶

Shortly after taking office, President Pierce offered Buchanan the highly important English post.⁴⁷ Once more the Pennsylvanian had to decide whether to hold to his retirement plans or return to the public scene. Again, and in what amounted almost to a ritual with him, he offered numerous reasons which could justify a refusal. Since he had assumed the responsibility for rearing his niece Harriet Lane, and did not know where he could leave her should he go to London, he offered this as a "serious objection" to an acceptance.⁴⁸ As another personal reason for refusing, Buchanan feared that should he go to England he would "violate my private and social duties towards an only brother, in very delicate health."⁴⁹ In addition, he wanted complete assurance that his recommendations would be followed by the President and by Secretary of State Marcy, otherwise he could see no reason for subjecting himself to the many ceremonies, the court etiquette, and the entertainments required of a minister. Finally, since he had no strong desire to go abroad, he felt that, at his age, he

⁴⁵ Buchanan to Miss Eliza Watterston, July 4, 1852, *ibid.*, VIII, 457-458. See also Buchanan to John Binns, July 26, 1852, Curtis, II, 41-42.

⁴⁶ In late 1852 there were several rumors that had Pierce selecting Buchanan as his Secretary of State; to these Buchanan could show only contempt: "Nothing short of an imperative and over-ruling sense of public duty could ever prevail upon me to pass another four years of my life in the laborious & responsible position which I formerly occupied." Buchanan to Pierce, Dec. 11, 1852, Moore, VIII, 493-499.

⁴⁷ Pierce to Buchanan, Mar. 30, 1853, *ibid.*, 504.

⁴⁸ Buchanan to Harriet Lane, Mar. 15, 1853, *ibid.*, 502. In another letter to his niece, Mar. 19, 1853, he wrote, "I think that a visit to Europe, with me as minister, would spoil you outright!" *Ibid.*, 503-504.

⁴⁹ Buchanan to Pierce, June 29, 1853, Curtis, II, 87-89.

would be content and happy to stay home.⁵⁰ After considerable pressure was brought to bear on him, he accepted the appointment, primarily because he wanted to promote harmony within the party, but also because of his deep sense of duty to his party. Still he was not happy with the appointment. He hoped that President Pierce would "look out for some better man to take my place," because he felt he could do more for the Administration as a private citizen than as a public minister.⁵¹ Then, in a letter to Cave Johnson, he wrote yearningly: "The happiest day I shall pass during my absence will be the day on which I shall discover the shores of my native land rising from the ocean on my return, should Heaven bless me & prolong my days until that happy event."⁵²

For the two and a half years between his arrival in England in August, 1853, until his departure in March, 1856, Buchanan represented the United States in numerous negotiations with Great Britain. His correspondence from London shows a deep personal concern for the responsibilities of his office and for the manner in which he was filling this important position.⁵³ But throughout this period he regularly remembered that he had promised to serve no more than two years in this capacity and therefore constantly looked forward to returning home and resuming his retirement. As early as October, 1853, he admitted, "my heart still points to my quiet home at Wheatland. I pray God, that I may enjoy it once more; & if this should be his will, I think I shall never leave it again on public business."⁵⁴ Perhaps he was homesick, but it is more likely that when he stated, "my heart . . . is still in my native land; and my dream of life is, that I should pass the remnant of my days . . . in retirement at Wheatland,"⁵⁵ he was expressing an honest distaste for public office, at least for the moment, and especially since this new assignment came so close on the heels of his 1852 disappointment.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Buchanan to Cave Johnson, May 3, 1853, Moore, VIII, 507-508; Buchanan to C. Hager and others, citizens of Lancaster, July 23, 1853, *ibid.*, IX, 26-27.

⁵¹ Buchanan to Pierce, July 7, 1853, Curtis, II, 90.

⁵² Buchanan to Cave Johnson, July 26, 1853, Moore, IX, 28.

⁵³ Buchanan to Miss Lane, Aug. 17, 1853, in which he said he hoped to perform his duties in "a determined & cheerful spirit." *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁵⁴ Buchanan to Miss Esther Parker, Oct. 21, 1853, *ibid.*, 74-75. Miss Parker had taken charge of Wheatland when Buchanan left for England.

⁵⁵ Buchanan to Hon. Ellis Lewis, Dec. 9, 1853, *ibid.*, 104-106. A week later he told Miss Parker, "My affections are all at home." *Ibid.*, 113-114.

Even before he had completed his first year in London he had reminded President Pierce at least once of the agreement for a two-year term. In a very humble letter, in which he acknowledged Pierce's approval of his work, he wrote: "I can say with sincerity, that I have no other public object in view than that of closing my mission here with honor to myself & advantage to my Country, & then retiring to my peaceful home. And I beg to remind you of your kind promise that you will permit me to do this, after two years' service."⁵⁶ Yet, in direct contrast, when certain newspapers published rumors in 1854 that he intended to return home before the expiration of the two years, he stoutly defended himself against this attack on his character and honor. "This was never my intention," he wrote to a friend, "and it is my purpose to remain here until the 30th Sept., the end of the quarter."⁵⁷ To avoid any chance of error he reminded Secretary Marcy of the agreement with Pierce and asked for a letter of recall terminating his mission on September 30.⁵⁸ Actually he was kept on station well beyond the end of the agreed-upon term, until March, 1856, a situation which rankled him somewhat and caused him anxiously to "expect to hear by every steamer of the appointment of my successor."⁵⁹

Not only did Buchanan have this concern to detract him from his work as minister, but there was also the ever-present inquiry about his political future. The man seemingly never had any respite from this. In 1854, when John Thomson Mason asked if he intended to return home early to re-enter the political arena, Buchanan resolutely replied: "Even if 'there were three or four Presidential terms in me,' not one of them should be 'gotten out.' *I shall not again be a candidate for the Presidency.*"⁶⁰ As if to justify taking this stand, Buchanan then went to great pains to explain the reasons behind it. In 1854 he was sixty-three years of age and would be nearly seventy on the completion of a four-year Presidential term (presuming it would be 1857-

⁵⁶ Buchanan to Pierce, Apr. 7, 1854, *ibid.*, 176-178. Buchanan reminded the President of essentially the same things in a letter of Sept. 1, 1854, commenting, "I am heartily tired of public life, and hope to pass the remnant of my days . . . in tranquillity and retirement." *Ibid.*, 251-253.

⁵⁷ Buchanan to J. Glancy Jones, Dec. 8, 1854, *ibid.*, XI, 492-493.

⁵⁸ Buchanan to Marcy, Apr. 26, 1855, *ibid.*, IX, 346.

⁵⁹ Buchanan to Jones, Dec. 18, 1855, *ibid.*, XI, 506-507.

⁶⁰ Buchanan to Hon. John Thomson Mason, May 30, 1854, *ibid.*, IX, 203-204.

1861). On this point Buchanan could only observe, "I think a wise man & one who desires to be a Christian ought to prefer retirement during the short remnant of days which a man at my age can reasonably expect." In addition he again called the Presidency a "crown of thorns," indeed the "most distinguished position in the world" but "not worth what it costs"; this was ample justification for him not to be interested in it. Finally, he did not feel his health was sufficiently strong to withstand the "labors & anxieties" of the office, therefore younger men ought to be chosen.⁶¹

If 1854 had been a relatively quiet year for Buchanan with respect to his political future, 1855, particularly the second half, was not only active but almost frightening. This was made so by the activities of his Pennsylvania friends, who regularly brought his name before the country as a Presidential possibility. In January, 1855, he told J. Glancy Jones that his Pennsylvania friends had brought him forward "upon their own hook," and that he had not allowed himself "to indulge a single personal aspiration on the subject." On the other hand, Buchanan did not overtly oppose this sort of thing, for it would accomplish two things: (1) it would make his retirement "doubly sweet" to know that his friends had not deserted him in his advancing years, and (2) it would give the Democrats of his state "their just influence" provided they remained united.⁶² Presumably this last meant that the Pennsylvania delegation to the national convention could use their unanimous support of Buchanan as a lever to gain an advantage in the convention give-and-take. A week later he took another opportunity to spell out his attitude toward the future when writing to Robert Tyler. This time there can be no doubt what he meant, for it is stated in clear, concise, and straightforward language; in fact, Buchanan went so far as to underline his words to provide the necessary emphasis: "*I am not, nor shall I be, a candidate for any office.*"⁶³ With this letter the question of his plans for the future disappeared from Buchanan's correspondence, but only for the moment.

Six months later, in letters to Robert Tyler and William Flinn, Buchanan once again brought his personal plans back into the lime-

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Buchanan often remarked how distasteful it was to him to see "old men struggling in the political arena for the honors and offices of this world."

⁶² Buchanan to Jones, Jan. 11, 1855, *ibid.*, XI, 493-495.

⁶³ Buchanan to Robert Tyler, Jan. 18, 1855, *ibid.*, 495-497.

light. To Tyler, who was concerned about taking a stand on a candidate for the Presidency, Buchanan wrote, "The presidency is a matter which I have dismissed from my thoughts. I shall not be a candidate for that office, and have lost all desire to enjoy this most distinguished honor."⁶⁴ Ten days later he wrote a more extended statement to Flinn: "You are right in all your conversations in stating emphatically that I am not a candidate for the Presidency. The office has no longer any charms for me, & I am now as anxious to pass into the shade of private life & enjoy peace & tranquillity during the remnant of my days, as I ever was to reach that high distinction."⁶⁵ The second statement constitutes a major confession for Buchanan that he had been eager for the Presidential nomination in 1852; it also casts a shadow of doubt on his personal honesty in the light of his many assertions to the contrary. He seldom was able to make up his mind beforehand on the question of public office, and seemingly was never sure what he really wanted after the opportunity had presented itself.

The concerted drive to send Buchanan to the White House originated with his Pennsylvania friends and was nurtured by many of his political friends, especially southerners, who saw in him the perfect candidate for the Democratic Party and their section. This drive existed long before 1855, but during that year and in the first half of the election year following it was accelerated and carried through successfully. It must be remembered that Buchanan held from the beginning that he never lifted a finger to promote or sanction the actions of his friends.

Early in November, 1855, he introduced yet another reason for not seeking public office⁶⁶:

You speak to me concerning the Presidency. You of all other persons best know that even if there were no other cogent reasons, the state of my health is not such as would enable me to undergo the intense anxiety & fatigue incident to wearing that crown of thorns. Of course I wish nothing said about the state of my health.

⁶⁴ Buchanan to Robert Tyler, July 3, 1855, *ibid.*, 500-502.

⁶⁵ Buchanan to William Flinn, July 13, 1855. He further claimed that he had written "in this spirit to every friend who has addressed me on the subject." *Ibid.*, IX, 372-373.

⁶⁶ Buchanan to Miss Lane, Nov. 9, 1855, *ibid.*, 457-458.

Appropriately, nothing further was said about his health, and Buchanan, as he once again began to warm up to the idea of the nomination, did not push the issue. A week later he still had not come to any firm conclusion on the Presidency, as an excerpt from a letter to Miss Lane indicates: "If I had any views to the Presidency, which I have not. . . ."⁶⁷

Perhaps more than any other moment, the turning point for Buchanan in his movements toward the nomination came in December, 1855, and January, 1856, during an exchange of letters with John Slidell. This friend from Louisiana was working on behalf of Buchanan (as he had in 1852) and had made some definite plans for the Pennsylvanian. In reply to an earlier letter, Buchanan at first endeavored to sidetrack Slidell in this drive:

I have no reserves to yourself either on the subject of the Presidency or any other subject, and yet I cannot make up my mind to write, *even to you*, "acknowledging the obligation under which every public man should be of obedience to the popular will." This would be an avowal that I am a candidate, to which I feel an irresistible disinclination.

There were many reasons for Buchanan's position: his advanced age, his desire to retire after having discarded "every idea of the Presidency," the many letters he had written distinctly stating he "would not be a candidate for this high office." But despite these objections, his supporters still went forward, claiming, as Buchanan put it, that their actions were "necessary to unite and consolidate the party and to give the honest, faithful, and true Democracy of the State their just influence." When they made this kind of an appeal—based on the party rather than the individual—Buchanan naturally relented; he agreed not to write any more letters declaring he was not a candidate. He went one step further in this letter to Slidell, introducing another of the vagaries which mark his attitude toward public office. In answer to the inevitable query of what he would do should the Cincinnati Convention nominate him without his consent, he replied, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." He would cross that bridge when he came to it. Then in a more realistic vein, he closed his letter with a statement that should have forced the Louisianian to

⁶⁷ Buchanan to Miss Lane, Nov. 16, 1855, *ibid.*, 465-466.

give up: "No desire lurks in my bosom to become President." Incidentally, it appears from this letter that Buchanan was concerned about how future historians would treat him in their study of his period and, as an afterthought, he gave another justification for not being interested in the Presidency: "I can now leave public life, I trust, with credit. Should I become President, the case may be very different, after I shall have worn myself out with the toil and anxiety of the office."⁶⁸

Slidell did not allow this letter and everything it implied to alter his plans. In reply he acted as though Buchanan had given him the necessary approval to go ahead, for he told him, by way of advice, "I am by no means certain that it is expedient for you to write anything for the public eye. You cannot well be in a better position than you are now."⁶⁹ Two weeks later Slidell gave every impression that the decision had been made and that Buchanan could expect to be nominated and elected: "So make up your mind, my dear Sir, that the cup will not be permitted to pass from you, & endeavor to bear your cross with as much patience as you can command. Mrs. S. thanks you for your kind recollections & promises herself much satisfaction when you shall occupy the White House."⁷⁰

In spite of these sentiments Buchanan made no apparent effort to look on his future in the same light. A series of letters written in February, 1856, just before he left London to return home gives indication of this. To Miss Lane he suggested that "my Presidential stock is declining in the market," mostly because he was not receiving "so many love letters on the subject" as before. Further, he confessed that "declining prospects give me no pain."⁷¹ Claiming that if his wishes had been consulted his name would never have been mentioned in connection with the Presidency, he told William Bigler, "I shall neither be disappointed nor in the slightest degree mortified should the Cincinnati Convention nominate another person."⁷² Beneath the surface, however, both letters reveal a greater interest in the Presidency than Buchanan was willing to admit publicly.

⁶⁸ Buchanan to Slidell, Dec. 28, 1855. Buchanan believed Slidell's personal friendship had led him astray in this game of President-making. *Ibid.*, 485-487.

⁶⁹ Slidell to Buchanan, Jan. 17, [1856], *ibid.*, X, 8.

⁷⁰ Slidell to Buchanan, Jan. 30, 1856, *ibid.*, 23.

⁷¹ Buchanan to Miss Lane, Feb. 8, 1856, *ibid.*, 40-41.

⁷² Buchanan to Gov. Bigler, Feb. 12, 1856, Curtis, II, 122-123.

In letters of February 15 he continued to belittle his Presidential chances. To his niece, he felt the "signs of the Times are not very auspicious to my experienced eye," and to his housekeeper at Wheatland, he hoped "to experience the delight of being idle, or rather doing what I please."⁷³ In a more serious vein, he told Secretary of State Marcy, "I know from the tone of your letter that you would consider me in a state of mental delusion if I were to say how indifferent I feel in regard to myself on the question of the next Presidency. You would be quite a sceptic."⁷⁴

By the end of February his attitude had changed somewhat from "wait-and-see" to a willingness to serve if nominated. As a party man this fits perfectly with Buchanan's ideas of party loyalty and responsibility. He gave the first evidence of this new approach in a letter to Miss Lane⁷⁵:

I receive letters from home some of which say with reference to the Presidency,—come home immediately, & others,—stay away a while longer. I shall not regulate my conduct with any view to this office. If it be the will of Providence to bestow upon me the Presidency, I shall accept it as a duty, a burden, & a trial, & not otherwise. I shall take no step to obtain it.

Then, in a letter to William B. Reed, he acted as if the decision was about to be made, probably in his favor: "I had hoped & believed that my public life would terminate with my present mission, but events must now take their course at the Cincinnati Convention." With his characteristic aloofness, he added that "never . . . did any man in my position care so little as to what this may be."⁷⁶

Buchanan returned to the United States in April, 1856, and subsequently was nominated by the Cincinnati Convention on the seventeenth ballot over Pierce and Douglas.⁷⁷ On being notified of his

⁷³ Buchanan to Miss Lane, Feb. 15, 1856, Moore, X, 49-51; Buchanan to "Miss Hetty," Feb. 15, 1856, Curtis, II, 124.

⁷⁴ Buchanan to Marcy, Feb. 15, 1856, Moore, X, 48-49.

⁷⁵ Buchanan to Miss Lane, Feb. 22, 1856, *ibid.*, 59-60.

⁷⁶ Buchanan to William B. Reed, Feb. 29, 1856, *ibid.*, 63-64.

⁷⁷ The story of the convention and the events leading up to it are skillfully told in Roy Franklin Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, 1948), 4-18, and Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union* (New York, 1947), II (*A House Dividing, 1852-1857*), 451-460. In a letter to James Gordon Bennett, editor of the *New York Herald*, Buchanan explained how he believed his nomination had come about: "The truth is that when I parted from you in Paris I had neither the purpose nor the desire again to become a candidate for the Presidency. A ground swell, however, in this State among a noble people who had sustained me for more than thirty years forced me reluctantly into the field." Moore, X, 95.

nomination, he expressed his deep thanks to the convention, repeated his familiar claim that he had "carefully refrained from seeking the nomination either by word or by deed," accepted the honor and promised that, if elected, he would discharge his duties "in such a manner as to allay domestic strife, preserve peace and friendship with foreign nations, and promote the best interests of the republic."⁷⁸ After being elected in November over John C. Frémont, the candidate of the newly formed Republican Party, Buchanan announced his plans for the future in his inaugural address: "Having determined not to become a candidate for re-election, I shall have no motive to influence my conduct in administering the government except the desire ably and faithfully to serve my country, and to live in the grateful memory of my countrymen."⁷⁹

An account of Buchanan's "inclination" to private life would not be complete without considering two letters written during the last stages of his administration. Because certain people as well as some newspapers were suggesting that he would be a candidate for re-election, he promptly reiterated his stand of March 4, 1857⁸⁰:

From the hour when in accepting the Cincinnati nomination I avowed the resolution not to become a candidate for a second term, I have never, in thought, word, or deed, deviated from it. I shall not, under any circumstances, change my fixed purpose. To impute such an intention to me is to charge me with gross inconsistency & hypocrisy.

Still there were some who wanted Buchanan to announce his candidacy despite his well-advertised statements to the contrary. But he would have none of this, and to stop such a movement from spreading, he wrote to Arnold Plumer, a warm personal friend and a delegate from Pennsylvania to the Charleston Convention of 1860⁸¹:

⁷⁸ R. G. Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan* (New York, 1856), 414-418.

⁷⁹ Inaugural Address, Mar. 4, 1857, in Moore, X, 105-113; also James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington, 1900), V, 430-436.

⁸⁰ Buchanan to J. L. Baker, July 25, 1859, Moore, X, 327-328. In another letter, to J. B. Baker, dated Feb. 28, 1860, he wrote essentially the same thing: "I need scarcely say that all allusion to myself as a Candidate for the Presidency ought to be avoided. Both my inclination & my judgment concur in the firm resolution I have adopted & proclaimed, not under any circumstances to be a Candidate." *Ibid.*, 393.

⁸¹ Buchanan to Hon. Arnold Plumer, Apr. 14, 1860, *ibid.*, 416-417.

I address you not only as a Delegate from Pennsylvania to the Charleston Democratic National Convention, but as an old & valued friend. Whilst trusting that no member of that Body will propose my name as a Candidate for re-election, yet lest this might possibly prove to be the case, I require you then immediately to inform the Convention, as an act of justice to myself, that in no contingency can I ever again consent to become a Candidate for the Presidency. My purpose to this effect was clearly indicated both in accepting the Cincinnati nomination & afterwards in my Inaugural address, & has since been repeated on various occasions, both public & private. In this determination neither my judgment nor my inclination has ever for a moment wavered.

His wishes were observed. On leaving the White House, James Buchanan retired to Wheatland to spend the remainder of his life.⁸²

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⁸² In a speech at Lancaster shortly after leaving office, Buchanan told this story to his neighbors and friends: "When I parted from President Lincoln, on introducing him to the Executive Mansion, according to custom, I said to him: 'If you are as happy, my dear sir, on entering this house as I am in leaving it, and returning home, you are the happiest man in this country!'" Curtis, II, 509-510.