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## PRESIDENT BUCHANAN RECEIVES A PROPOSAL FOR AN ANTI-MORMON CRUSADE, 1857

David A. Williams\*

The author of the letter which is reproduced herein, Robert Tyler, was a son of John Tyler, tenth president of the United States. The Tyler family's American roots stretched back to the mid-seventeenth century when its first representatives settled in Virginia. President Tyler, first vice-president to succeed to the Presidency following the death of William H. Harrison in 1841, like his father attended William and Mary and sent his son there also. Educated in the classic manner, Robert subsequently studied law under the direction of Professor Beverly Tucker. He acted as private secretary to his father during his years in the White House, but thereafter his career was dominated by the law and his political interests.

Philadelphia became Robert Tyler's home toward the end of his father's term and it was there that he became a very active member of the Democratic Party, and a well-known friend and political ally of James Buchanan. The association between these two men, evidenced by numerous letters exchanged by them, began in the late 1840s and persisted through the Civil War, when Robert Tyler served in the Treasury Department of the Confederate Government. In an earlier

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and happier time, he supported Buchanan for president (unsuccessfully in 1852, but successfully in 1856). During Buchanan's administration, Robert Tyler was consulted on many matters. As the long-time champion of Buchanan, he had ready access to the President, and as the chairman of the Democratic executive committee of Pennsylvania, he was a major figure in party councils.

This letter, for which no reply has been discovered, is a significant document in presenting the private views of a well-known advisor to Buchanan. In clear detail it spells out the political gain that would emerge if the public mind were turned from "Bleeding Kansas," which was tearing the country and the Democratic Party asunder, to crusade against the Mormons. The degree to which it influenced the thinking of the administration and its decision to launch the military operation known as the Mormon War is not precisely known, but it demands more attention than it usually receives from those who interpret this episode. Even in the best treatment of the subject to date, Norman Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict* (Yale University Press, 1960) it is somewhat slighted. In the book from which Furniss obtained the letter, Philip G. Auchampaugh, *Robert Tyler, Southern Rights Champion* (Hinman Stein, Duluth, Minnesota, 1934) it is poorly handled. As it stands, it represents a blatant attempt to pander to prejudice in an effort to realize political gain. The fact that it could be seriously advanced by a son of a former president of the United States to the incumbent President in and of itself, makes it a significant document in the political history of Mormonism in America.

Phila: April 27, 1857

My dear sir:

The public mind is becoming greatly excited on the subject of *Mormonism*. The Popular Idea is rapidly maturing that Mormonism (already felt slightly in our large Northern cities) should be put down and utterly extirpated.

*I believe that we can supercede the Negro-Mania with the almost universal excitements of an Anti-Mormon Crusade. Certainly it is a subject which concerns all the Religious Bodies & reaches every man's fireside with a peculiar interest. Should you, with your accustomed grip, seize this question with a strong*

fearless & resolute hand, the Country I am sure will rally to you with an earnest enthusiasm & the pipings of Abolitionism will hardly be heard amidst the thunders of the storm we shall raise. Were I President I would put down & cast out this hideous imposture, equally at War with Conscience, Reason & Philosophy, at all hazards. I would take the ground that the case was anomalous & altogether exceptional—without the limits of ordinary Constitutional treatment—& that the principles of the Democratic Party in regard to Territories consequently had no application. The eyes & hearts of the Nation may be made to find so much interest in Utah as to forget Kansas.

I see (by telegraph) that Mr. Forney has purchased one fourth of the Pennsylvanian & is coming here as Editor. I am heartily glad of this provided he will come here to serve your cause faithfully & to conduct his Editorial office with strict impartiality to all. In this event he will be most welcome & will succeed—otherwise he will be certain to fail in a manner deplorable to yourself & injurious to the Party. I send an article from the Herald. Pray put not the slightest faith in Bennett, a greater or mischievous knave does not live!

His Exclly  
James Buchanan

ever your friend  
Ro: Tyler

Philip G. Auchampaugh, *Robert Tyler, Southern Rights Champion*, Duluth, Minnesota: 1934, pp. 180-181.