During the first third of the nineteenth century, American culture underwent significant changes. The republic was becoming an urban, industrialized society with a larger and less homogeneous spread over a much wider geographical area. The organic, deferential society of the late eighteenth century was becoming the more equalitarian, participatory democracy of the Jacksonian period.¹

The examples of change in the early nineteenth century are numerous. Politically, the poor showing of the Federalists in the presidential election of 1816 led to a realignment of the political party system. By the 1820s, universal manhood suffrage for white adult males had become a reality in most states. Economically, iron production, textile manufacturing, and the number of banks had increased dramatically. Trade unions were appearing in the growing urban centers of the East. The Abbots and Astors, the Coopers and Lawrences represented a new monied elite based on the nascent industrialization. In 1818, the standing order was disestablished in Connecticut while in Massachusetts the orthodox Congregationalists lost the important Dedham Pulpit case to the Unitarians in 1821. The number of Roman Catholics in the republic increased, as ever increasing numbers of German and Irish immigrants arrived.

Cheap land in the West and the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 contributed to a shift in population westward. The number of inhabitants of the trans-Appalachian region rose from somewhat more than 1,000,000 in 1810 to about 3,000,000 by 1830. Sectional tensions, which had been manifested in the Hartford Convention of 1814 and the Missouri Compromise of 1820, were not alleviated as five new states were admitted from the West between 1816 and 1821. A lack of unanimity over land policy, tariff legislation, and national improvements revealed the nation to be clearly divided into eastern, southern, and western blocs.

The established Protestant order was threatened, not only by disestablishment and the growth of Catholicism, but by the very process of modernization itself. In response to societal change, evangelical Protestants formed nearly a dozen voluntary benevolent societies between 1815 and 1830 to buttress their value system. Organizations such as the American Bible Society, the American Colonization Society, the American Home Missionary Society, the American Sunday School Union, and the American Tract Society, were established to maintain the republic on a sound and sober Christian basis.


The executive committee of the American Tract Society, for example, proclaimed upon the creation of their association in 1825 that

Every new institution (of a benevolent character) . . . exerts a happy influence on our national union, and is a new accession of the best and strongest affections of the human heart, gathered from the remotest parts of the land, to 'lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes' that bind together the body politic; so that while public opinion maintains its existing ascendancy, every new accession of diffusive benevolence will render it more and more difficult for the spirit of faction or usurpation to sever this cemented country.

As the founders of the American Tract Society were well aware, the area of the republic that most needed "cementing" was the trans-Appalachian West and the "cement" required was evangelical Protestantism.

In winning the West and combatting Catholicism, the American Tract Society represented a testimonial to the evangelical belief in the ability of the printed word to sway people's souls. As stated in its Constitution, its object was

to diffuse a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality, by the circulation of Religious Tracts, calculated to receive the approbation of all Evangelical Christians.

Based in New York City, the American Tract Society distributed 65,000,000 tracts within six years. Tracts were sold at cost, ten pages for a penny in the late 1820s, and were given at no cost to the poor. Auxiliary societies and a systematic colportage effort were used to cope with the vastness of the West. On the frontier, large numbers of tracts were readily distributed and designed to fill the


5. The Address of the Executive Committee, p. 23.

void created by a paucity of Christian institutions. Paid $150.00 a year, the western colporteur served to bring the backwoodsman under the moral government of God and under the religious sway of evangelical Protestantism.\(^7\)

The concerns of an American Tract Society agent in the trans-Appalachian West are revealed in a series of letters written by Elizur Wright, Jr., a colporteur in western Pennsylvania from November, 1828 to March, 1829. Born in South Canaan, Connecticut in 1804, raised in the Western Reserve, and graduated from Yale in 1826, Wright spent the next two years as a school-master at Groton, Massachusetts. Dissatisfied with his role at Groton Academy, Wright was attracted by the idea of evangelizing the West as a tract agent.\(^8\) If pedagogy was measured by success in imparting the rules of grammar to students, the colporteur, Wright wrote to his fiancée, Susan Clark, on 1 November 1828, had the opportunity “to affect the destinies of multitudes to all ages reclaiming them from the degrading service of sin to that of the living and true God, raising them from all the pains of hell, to all the joys of an eternal heaven.”\(^9\)

A major difficulty facing Wright in his colportage of western Pennsylvania was the expanse of territory he had to cover. In a letter dated 6 November 1828, he noted that “so vast is this country that a hundred miles makes but a small figure on any map you see.” The population was isolated and bereft of religious influence. Neighbors were unlikely to live as close as a mile apart, and were separated by dense maple and beech forests. The meeting houses were of hewed logs and the homes of a similar rugged appearance. Yet, it was clear that western Pennsylvanians were adapting in their own way to the wilderness.

If the wilderness itself poised problems for the tract agent, the frontier city of Pittsburgh clearly needed spiritual regeneration

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9. The original manuscripts of the Elizur Wright, Jr. letters are in the Library of Congress; the typescripts are in the Boston Public Library.
also. Wright referred disparagingly to Pittsburgh as the “black city,” for its furnaces blotted out the heavens. The talk of the town was not of “eternal rewards,” but rather of today’s profits. The ethos of evangelicalism was hard put to contend with canalling and commerce, industrialization and urbanization. Writing on 26 February 1829, Wright complained that Pittsburgh’s dominant business concerns meant that “Men are too much engaged for themselves to mind the welfare of others.” The individualistic spirit of Pittsburgh’s nascent capitalism was viewed as antithetical to Christian charity and community.

Another challenge was the substantial numbers of Irish immigrants, many of whom were Roman Catholics. In a letter dated 7 February 1829, Wright observed that the Irish Catholics of Butler County, Pennsylvania were “very ignorant” and “but little above the half civilized state.” Yet, tract distribution went well among the Irish, even if tracts were at first confused with land, not religious literature. Among the impoverished Irish, Wright distributed his wares freely. He believed, however, that the local priest would personally profit by exacting a pecuniary penance from his flock for having strayed into Protestant pastures. In a letter of 20 February 1829, Wright recounted his visit to a local Irish priest. Refusing a drink of brandy as being against his principles, Wright engaged the priest in biblical exegesis in which both parties talked past the other. Wright was, nevertheless, impressed enough with his religious adversary to note that “the whole [encounter] made me wish I was as good a follower of Christ as he was of Antichrist.”
Faced with the obstacles of a vast wilderness, a booming frontier city, and destitute Irish Catholics, Wright doggedly carried out his mission. In the little town of Sewickley, Pennsylvania, he rode some twelve miles on horseback in order to gather a dozen people into an auxiliary tract society. While in Pittsburgh, he formed several tract societies and raised $250.00 for the cause. Although noting on 30 December 1828 that “All around me is moral death,” he never lost the faith that tracts were a means to salvation. Tracts might save Catholics and Campbellites. In his home area of Portage County, Ohio, Wright gave away enough religious literature to supply every family that lived in a town lacking a church. Wright himself was personally moved by such pietistic testimonies of spiritual faith, as “The Dairyman’s Daughter,” “The Young Cottager,” and the “Conversion of Mrs. Eleanor Emerson.” Although he may not have achieved the goal of “putting at least one tract in every home west of the Allegheny,” he did calculate that by 29 January 1829 he had distributed 50,000 pages of tracts, formed twenty auxiliary tract societies, and ridden 1,000 miles.

Although Wright noted on 30 December 1828 that he might valuably spend a lifetime in tract work, the offer of a professorship at Western Reserve College in Hudson, Ohio, with duties to be assumed immediately, was too compelling not to accept. Resigning from the American Tract Society after only four months on the job, Wright’s new position did allow him to continue the effort to educate and evangelize the West. In addition, he was reunited with his family in Tallmadge, Ohio and was now in a position to marry Susan Clark.

Wright’s experience as a tract agent in western Pennsylvania during the late 1820s illustrated the concerns of evangelical Protestantism. Wright had personally contended with the problems of social control in the West. He had labored to evangelize a vast wilderness, to regenerate a profit-mongering Pittsburgh, and to convert Catholic immigrants. He spread, not only the message of Christ’s atonement for mankind, but also the value system of the established

10. Wright mentioned the tracts in a letter of 12 October 1828. Both “The Dairyman’s Daughter” (tract number 9) and “The Young Cottager” (tract number 79) were authored by the Rev. Legh Richmond. The “Conversion of Mrs. Eleanor Emerson” (tract number 1330) was written by Emerson herself. No dates of publication are given.

11. Wright noted this in a letter of 12 October 1828.

Christian order which was seeking to shape a changing America in its own image. Ultimately, the conservative goals of the benevolent societies failed. Religious tracts, Bibles, and Sunday schools were unable to contain the expansion, disruption, and secularization of nineteenth century American society.

Yet, evangelical Protestantism itself can not be simply summed up as a reactionary force. Evangelical Protestantism, albeit not in the form of the benevolent societies themselves, also contributed to the impulse for social change in antebellum America. While an older generation of evangelicals, characterized by Lyman Beecher, continued their fight for religious orthodoxy and the colonization of freed blacks in Liberia, a younger generation, of whom Elizur Wright, Jr. is representative, moved away from the fight against religious infidelity and into the front ranks of immediate abolition.

A few years after leaving the American Tract Society, Wright saw slavery as the most heinous sin abroad in the land. With all the zeal of his recent colporteur past, Wright, who became secretary for domestic correspondence of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, directed that organization's agents in a crusade against the sin of slavery. In brief, evangelical Protestantism was a double-edged sword. On the one side, it unsuccessfully attempted to beat back the forces of change, and, on the other, contributed mightily to the destruction of slavery.

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ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR., TO SUSAN CLARK, TALLMADGE, OHIO, 12 OCTOBER 1828.

My dearest Susan,

I delight in the thought that you this day enjoy the company . . . of Christ Jesus and his Prophets & Apostles. I too, tho' distant, will hold communion with you on the subject for which this day was made. O how little is this world and all its business & studies, & friendships in comparison with the attainment of purity of heart. Truly out of the heart are the issues of life. The sinful heart, I speak from

experience of one that I know of, may hold this language.—"I have sinned till sinning has become my nature. I feel that the course is unworthy, but still I hold on; I am respected, trusted & beloved by fellow beings, but what of that, it is unsatisfying now, & soon it will be swept away forever, for, O! all is hollow within! There is no foundation in my character for an eternal friendship. But if this load of sin could be removed—if this old man (Adam himself) could be slain within me, which makes me do evil when I would do good, how would I—not exalt in my purity of character—no, for I would walk humbly before God forever—but, how would I rejoice in the service of God my Maker, how would the consciousness of his approbation fill my soul with delights, with joy unspeakable and full of glory,—how sweet would be his service, when no notion would mingle in it unworthy to be told to the universe?" To attain this purity of the heart, it must be humbled in this life—not humbled in one thing & at one time, but thrown down at the foot of the cross, for all, & forever. Pride, pride is our ruin. In some shape or other we all feed on it, and O what a starvation! What have we, that we did not receive? What have we received that we do not daily abuse? When pride is destroyed & the soul humbled, & not before, we are ready to enter the service of God. Then we can give ourselves to God without reserve & labour in His place & at His wages. And will he not direct us for the best? Yes. Miserably do they mistake who do not cast all their cares upon the Lord & trust him. In a tract entitled, if I do not mistake, "A Memoir of Mrs. Eleanor Emerson," you will see clearly the benefit of humbling the soul & taking up the cross. Everyone of us has a cross to take up. I trust, my dear Susan, that you are delighted & improved by those means of grace which you enjoy & that the Lord is nourishing in you a character which will recommend his Gospel to the world. If He is not, it's your fault. (Salvation from sin is work enough for a whole life, it is worthy to engage all the enthusiasm of the soul, therefore watch over every thought, word, & action.) Meditate much on the height & depth of God's love in Christ. Wear next to your heart that heavenly maxim "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22). I say this because I feel my own deficiency. I hope however I am beginning to feel more of the spirit which qualifies for the gospel ministry. Surely no one had greater cause for humility and unreserved devotion to God than I. It will not be God's fault if I do not possess these qualifications. These thoughts have been brought home to me while reading the publications of the Am. Tract Soc. especially those well
known & lovely tracts "The Dairyman’s Daughter" & "The Young Cottager." The Rev. Legh Richmond the author of them lived to hear of 300 hopeful conversions occasioned by the first. He died a few years ago. How many think you he as already met in glory save by these two tracts—and will meet to the end of time? Who would not wish to be such a humble devoted minister as that same Richmond even if his name were never to known beyond his own parish in this world? The proud may despise tracts, but I would rather be the author of such a one as the D’s Daughter, or the Swearer’s prayer, than any book in the world besides. (Monday Morning). My dearest dear. Just after I last wrote, I received a letter from Mr. Hallock of N.Y., Secretary of the Am. Tract Soc., asking if I could devote my ‘whole time to an agency for at least one year.’ You know how much I feel interested in the cause of tracts. I replied that my whole heart was in the work, and I would devote myself to it not only for a year, but till the work (which is putting at least one tract in every home west of the Alleghany) is done, excepting however the months of August & September of next year which I said were already disposed of. All this upon the supposition that I succeed. If I succeed, & the Soc. thinks my services desirable I shall, with your consent, settle in some central place to take care of a depository and exert an influence on the surrounding country. If I prove to be the man to do such a thing, I shall be vastly more useful than as a mere preacher.

ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR. TO SUSAN CLARK, PITTSBURGH, NOVEMBER 1828.

My dear, dear Susan,

Last Monday early in the morning your Tract Agent set out from his western home—well mounted, equipped with a large pair of saddlebags, stuffed with tracts & Wearables, etc.—now he’s writing to you in the public room of a crowded hotel in this noisiest of all cities. Men are talking around him largely about canalling. . . . So vast is this country that a hundred miles makes but a small figure on any map you can see. Nevertheless, I have passed through all the following places since Monday. First Suffield, Deerfield, Berlin, Ellsworth, Canfield, Boardman, Poland & Petersburgh in Ohio & Little Beaver, Greensburg, Sharon, Beaver, Economy & Alleghany Town in Pa. The first of my way lay across the Little Cuyahoga which is skirted with moderate hills, and the settlements poor & scattering.
GOODHEART AND CURRY

In Randolph commences the level beech and maple country peculiar to the seat. Suppose a level plain as wide as from Groton (Mass.) to Boston—then cover it with trees as high as the Groton, orthodox steeple at least, and cover it entirely—then cut a street through it from one end to the other as straight as an arrow, four rods wide—then cut out square farms, here on this side, and, here on that, and sometimes join them together for three or four miles, set out large orchards in straight rows both ways—build large framed barns even when the houses are of logs, like cob houses—build some framed houses, paint some of them, but do not make elegant door yards or display much taste, altho' you may display some ornament on the fronts of the houses if you please, and you will have a sketch of the eastern part of the Western Reserve. . . . I attended the ordination of a Welsh clergyman for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the clergy in this vicinity. The services were partly in Welsh & partly in English. The people are emigrants from Wales & understand but little of English. It gives me a great idea of the extent of Christ's kingdom to hear worship in a foreign language. After this I rode down the Ohio 12 miles to a little place called Sewickly where on the next day (Saturday) I formed a little Tract Society. I had to ride to the amount of a dozen miles to get the people together for this purpose & after all there were not much more than a dozen of them. I have not time to tell you all how the people live here, but I will say a single word about the house & premises of Elder McLaughlin where I spent the night. It stands two miles back among the mighty hills which in these parts skirt "the long river." Four or five large fields, some of them now green with the springing, comprehending the lofty declivities of as many hills, encircle the house. It is a structure of logs hewed on both inside & out & laid in mud. At the corners they are notched together so that not one of them can stir from its place. There are two stories, two rooms in each story, a stoop in front, & an immense fireplace to warm the principal room. There is no plastering on the inside to cover the hewed logs. It stands not on a rising ground, nor on the road, but down deep in the valley by the side of a living spring. The same may be said of nearly every house in this part of Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvanians are a people who care nothing for taste or improvement & are determined to go on just as their fathers have gone before them. . . .
ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR. TO SUSAN CLARK, PITTSBURGH, 24 NOVEMBER 1828.

My dearest Susan:

I came into the city this day to meet the Rev. O. Eastman, general agent for the Tract Soc. for the Valley of the Mississippi. . . . Nov. 25. Mr. Eastman arrived just as I finished the preceding page. After a day spent in consultation with him & in efforts to excite the good people in Pittsburgh to do more in the cause of Tracts, it is very nearly determined that I shall remain in Western Pennsylvania till the whole of it occupied with auxiliaries, which will probably be during the whole winter. I should greatly prefer to labour in my own state (Ohio), but I think it best on the whole to follow implicitly the wishes of the Am. Tract Society, which in its mighty & systematic operations is bringing blessings upon the whole land. (I am resolved that whatever I attempt, & wherever, it shall be done thoroughly). . . . If we live for this life only, or mostly, we sadly mistake our own interests, for the comforts of life lose all their value when made the main objects of living). "The righteous" truly "shall not want any good thing" and that too if they have not where to lay their heads. . . . Tomorrow I go to McKeesport 12 miles up the Monongahela to form a Tract Soc. After returning & spending a day here I hope at least to get clear of this noisy, smoky city. (What should you think of a city where the black mud on the pavements was over shoe. . . . By steam the water is henceforth to [be]pumped up from the river into a reservoir on the top of a hill overlooking the city. In short so full is the city of smoke from all these immense fires of mineral coal that one cannot see from one end of a straight level street to the other. The coal is dug as free as dirt all over the country for fifty miles around). . . .

ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR. TO SUSAN CLARK, PITTSBURGH, 12 DECEMBER 1828

My own Susan,

. . . As I have a little leisure today, you shall have a word or two more about Pittsburgh. The sun is shining today in a clear blue sky & it is warm enough to walk out with a coat unbuttoned. The furnaces all around me however are doing their best to hide the azure vault. All manner of hammers too are making a mock of silence.
This city of blacksmiths cares little what the day is overhead. If you can walk out with me, tho' I could not afford you very clean side walks & you might even go over shoe in black mud at the crossings, yet I could show you come things worth being seen. Pittsburgh lies thus. I'm not now teaching you how to draw maps. Many of the little streets, I leave out, and perhaps the great ones are not all as they should be. At Mrs. Morgan's boarding house just after dinner I say, are you ready to walk my love? Well, you catch hold of my arm & we sally out into Third St. Turn to our left into Market St. Then down St. Clair St. Here we come to a long and [illegible] bridge across the Alleghany. I pay the publican that keeps it 8 cents both for you and me, going and coming. This is a roofed bridge, 400 yards, or nearly a quarter of mile long, perfectly straight & level, resting on six stone piers so high that a steamboat may pass under & having footwalks built on the outside in the manner of a piazza. . . . These footwalks afford a delightful promenade, I am told, many people in summer pay the toll, 4 cents, just for the pleasure of walking over on one side & back on the other. The whole is painted white & makes a fine show at a distance. We are now in Alleghany town. See a splendid mansion on the bank of the river, cross the Pennsylvania Canal which connects Pittsburgh with Philadelphia with the exception of about 40 miles land carriage over the mountains. It is new, and has not yet been filled with water. We rise [to] the second bank, & walk along in front of the Penitentiary. It has a fine appearance being 8 square [illegible] and having a high circular tower at every angle. The front [is] very lofty, built of stone, covering six acres. From the Penitentiary, we ascend a high hill where we find 30 or 40 Irishmen at work levelling down the site of the Western Theological Seminary. They have tumbled an immense mass of rocks down the steep side. This building will not be founded on the sand. Turning towards the city, we see it far beneath us, sending up the same murky cloud which has never ceased to hang over it from its birth. We are filled with admiration at the result of human industry—What a great hill a parcel of little ants will raise. At our feet starts the sublime Ohio. . . . We cast our eyes upon the Alleghany above [the] Bridge & see huge stone piers rising from the surface, some of them already 30 feet above it. Upon these a branch of the canal is to be carried across into the city. The aqueduct is to be covered like the bridge. We descend, recross the Alleghany, walk up Liberty St. till we come to the canal, turn to our right among a multitude of stone cutters. Ascend Grant's
Hill. Here the canal enters a stone arch & passes through, or will pass through when the arch (or tunnel) is completed, the hill [being] quite out of my map. It comes round and enters the Monongahela. . . . They cut the hill down from the top about 70 feet, make an arch of stone & then put the earth back upon it. All this to take the canal to the steamboats which lie in the Monongahela, & because there is not room for it to go through the city. The tunnel will be I should guess at least 300 yards long. We pass along the top of the ridge . . . where [there] is a large reservoir, like a great cellar, just built to supply the city with water. It is about 100 feet above the surface of the river. They propose to fill it from the Alleghany by a pump driven by steam. This they have been trying to do for a week past, but the pressure of the water has burst the great iron pipe in two or three places, tearing up the pavement and deluging the streets etc. The water is to be carried from this in iron pipes all over the city. Here we have another good view of the city, & the beautiful village of Alleghany town which we have just left. There are but two steeples in the city. One, of the court house, & the other of a Gothic, Episcopal Church—a square tower with four minarets at the corners. There are eight or ten meetinghouses, plain brick buildings. We have a beautiful view also of the Monongahela bridge. It is like the other except that the cat walks are inside. It is 500 yards long and rests on 7 piers. We see iron works, glass works, paper mills, cotton factories etc., etc., all moved by steam. Cross Smithfield St. & pass down Wood St. to the Monongahela. See the river full of manner of boats, their flags flying. They look better than the Eastern boats, having their cabins all above. Frequently they have four tiers of windows one above the other, like a four story dwelling. We go board the Robert Fulton, admire the sumptuousness of its cabin, the strength of its machinery etc. Here we see them landing huge piles of lead from Galena, there molasses from New Orleans—iron, cotton, corn, flour, pork, are everywhere in the way. As we ascend the bank which overlooks the river, The Delaware, S.B., fires her signal gun, bears away from the wharf, passes up the stream to show herself, downs her flag staff, and goes under the bridge, chimneys standing, turns and sweeps back before us, fires her farewell gun & away she goes. The gun was nothing [compared] to its echo which came thundering back from the opposite mountain as though all its rocks were tumbling into the river. This mountain rises almost perpendicularly from the river to a great height. It is full of stone quarries & coal mines. The top is a table land.
GOODHEART AND CURRY

Here having seen enough of the "Smoky City" you vanish away & leave me to get to my lodgings & drink my tea & write this history alone. . . .

ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR. TO SUSAN CLARK, MERCER, PENNSYLVANIA, 30 DECEMBER 1828

My dearest Susan,

... Providence has cast my lot in Western Penna., the most healthy part of the world. This country has been settled 30 years & I never fail to lodge well and have every comfort which I could wish. The people are remarkable for their hospitality. . . . I was really willing to expose myself a little for the cause of Christ, but it seems not to be his will that I should do it. My business suits me more and more every day. I have a sort of design growing up in me lately to settle at home & make it my business as God shall prosper me to promote the circulation Tracts on the Western Reserve till a whole bound series of them shall be found in every family. It would be salvation to a multitude of souls.—Worth a life, wouldn't it? Only think of these precious works conversing with parents & children, old & young, every Sabbath morning, & every leisure hour of the week, only think of them, worn by the hard hands of industry & wet by the tears of repentance in more than 20,000 families. Read the Tracts & you will desire to have them converse with every immortal soul that is in danger of the second death. . . . When I last wrote I was in Pittsburgh, where I formed several Tract Societies—three very interesting ones in as many Sabbath Schools. We raised there about 250 dollars. On the 15th I started for this country and arrived here the third day. Have rode about 100 miles since & established 5 Societies & have made 4 appointments for this week. The weather all this while has been fine beyond description. The ground hard frozen without snow, but the air soft & pure & the sun shining in the clear blue sky. This [is] a great wilderness to be sure, but there are no dangers in it, more than there are in your father's orchard. The only wild beast that I have seen was an innocent buck that leaped across the road before me yesterday. If you were to travel through this country you would wonder where its 15,000 people all were. The country is 35 miles long & 25 broad. Now suppose 3,000 families sprinkled over this great territory & they will be lost from each other. Each family will have a hole cut for himself in the woods but probably not a neighbor within a mile.
This is the Pennsylvania way of settling. There are "big roads" as they call them cut through the woods, but seldom a house near them. The people prefer to build near some spring. Even their meeting houses where they were abundantly able to build better, are hewed log houses in the woods. The graves are hard by, each one fenced up [by] a little pen of poles—or sometimes rude palings. They tie their horses, or beasts as they say, to the limbs of the trees. Often when I alight at a house here, some fair damsel, trips out takes off my saddle & puts up my horse & is back before I am aware of it. Yesterday I rode two miles in company with two daughters of a minister, one of them was mounted on a three year old, which cut fine capers—She said she got a fall sometimes, but she had no other beast to ride. . . .

ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR. TO SUSAN CLARK, BUTLER PENNSYLVANIA, 29 JANUARY 1829

My only & dearest Susan,

.... Picture to yourself the devoted, though unworthy object of your love, on the 27th inst. (Tuesday)—Rising in the comfortable habitation of an Irishman in the wilds of Venango Co.—Breakfasting on buttered & honeyed buckwheats—(But I must bestow a word upon these Irish—very hospitable many of them, but I have to make up in hunger what they want in neatness which amounts to going without at least one of the three usual meals of the day. Their fare consists of a dish of fried pork which has been hung up fresh, exposed to whatever dust & smoke has not found its way up (the) chimney & which I taste as little as politeness will allow. A stack of buckwheat cakes a foot high in a large tin pan. A liberal plate of butter and a tea cup or saucer full of honey, into which each one sticks the point of his knife and gets more or less according to its consistence. The latter part would be without fault to me if things were clean—but a good apetite makes up every deficiency—how much better my fare, than dyspepsia over a bright knife & clean plate!) Now see me saddling my horse, throwing my Buffalo over my saddlebags—and putting spurs to my good horse Hannibal in a smart snow storm. Threading a crooked path amile or two to the "Big road" through the thick woods, finding the said "Big road" running in a different direction from what I expected, not knowing which end to take, a ruinous old cabin in a little opening could not
tell me—taking the right hand at a venture, riding miles & miles before I came to any human dwelling, at length hallooing before an Irish hovel, out jumped two or three big dogs, a tame deer, and a ragged, dirty generation of children from the size of manhood downwards to tell me the welcome news that I was in the right way to Butler. Pushing on through the snow storm which happily came upon by back, you see me arrive at a great, but very muddy turnpike, get my horse fed and try to warm myself at a great stove in the tavern, more smoke than fire—Mounting again at 1/2 past 1 P.M. You see me pushing on through the mud & snow, counting the mile stones (wooden ones) first 12, then 10, then 8 and so on, thinking of her that was far away. . . . I have put about 50,000 pages of Tracts in circulation, formed 20 auxiliaries & rode 1,000 miles since I first left home. I rejoice to think that the seed is good altho' the sower is unworthy. . . .

ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR. TO ELIZUR WRIGHT, SR. AND CLARISSA WRIGHT, BUTLER, PENNSYLVANIA, 7 FEBRUARY 1829.

My dear Parents,

You will by this time wish to know something of my wanderings since I left the best of all possible homes. From the meeting of Presbytery I proceeded to Warren. . . . The same day I reached Mercer. At Sharon a little village of about 30 homes I stopped & while my horse was eating his oats, put two or three tracts in every family. These people are followers of [Alexander] Campbell but they thanked me for the tracts, & I hope the good seed will not be lost. From Mercer I proceeded to visit the remaining congregations in Mercer Co. (Formed four auxiliaries in that Co. Have since formed 6 in Butler Co.) Am now at Rev. John Coulter, three miles from Butler village, expect to form a society here today to remain with Mr. C[oulter] over the Sabbath when the Lord's Supper is to be administered. . . . I find this county (Butler) much behind any that I have yet visited. The people are chiefly emigrants from Ireland—very ignorant. Many of them [are] R[oman] Catholics. A great part of them are but little above the half civilized state. Such a tour as I am making among these people would cure any man of the notion that anything short of the power & grace of God can raise the

16. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) was a founder of the Disciples of Christ. Popu-
larly known as the Campbellites, they were theologically an offshoot of the Baptists. Western Pennsylvania was a center of their activity.
degraded race of man to a happy state of society. O how much do we owe the Divine Grace! It is that which has made us differ even in the comforts of this life. . . .

ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR. TO SUSAN CLARK, PITTSBURGH, 20 FEBRUARY 1829

My Dearest Dear,

. . . Since I wrote from Butler I have been riding almost every day. . . . I have penetrated many an Irish cabin since my last. Two days I spent altogether distributing Tracts gratuitously. I had to ride at least 30 miles to visit 20 families. Most of these were Roman Catholics. They had never seen a Tract. Says I to one of them, "I am an agent for distributing religious Tracts; would you like to see one of them?" "Is it tracts of land you mean?" "No, I mean religious books. Said I." He took half a dozen, surprised that I parted with them for nothing. Probably this distribution of Tracts will be some dollars in the priest's pocket, as the poor wretches will have to do penance for receiving them. But they will be read. I called on the Priest who is a dapper little Irishman, and talks so fast that I could hardly stick in a word edgewise. He was very polite and urged me to drink some brandy which, of course, I refused as belonging to the cold water. "We Catholics are well satisfied with our religion," said he, "you come to make us doubt, & . . . the Scripture says He that doubteth is damned." "If he eat," added I, "We must take Scripture in its connection. You might as well quote from Scripture, "If sinners entice thee, consent thou"—Besides does it follow that everyone that does not doubt is safe." "Ah, it is the plain declaration of your own Bible," said he, "He that doubteth is damned." "Show me the passage," I replied. "Can you read Latin?" "Yes." He then took his Latin Bible asking me in which of the Gospels it might be. I told him that I thought not in any of them. He hunted a little while but could not find it. I then showed him Romans 14:28.17 He then flew off upon some other point, & we talked a long time to no purpose—The whole made me wish I was as good a follower of Christ as he appeared to be of Antichrist. But if we differ it is all by grace. We have sinned against greater lights than the poor Catholics & perhaps against greater than many of their Priests. A

17. Romans 14:23—"But he who has doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."
beautiful rifle & a little crucifix were the most remarkable pieces of furniture in this priest's study. But I must be short at this time. The Lord has wonderfully preserved me & prospered me in my undertaking. . . .

BY THEIR SOUER GROUT YE SHALL KNOW THEM:

Union Forge, Nov. 26, 1820

Dear Charly,

By the Carter, John Keensel, Mrs. Weidman has sent a small Box with a few Ear bobs—which might do to adorn your Brow when you attend the Coronation of the Governor-elect. Jacob is now here who tells me that he expects you at Harrisburgh on the 14th. next month, at the Inauguration of the Poor old General.

I am sorry to understand by your letter that you are so much in the loss to Distinguish between the Finlyite from a Heisterite. I would advise you to purchase some strong-scented Dutch Cheese and some Souer-grout and place it on your sideboard and whenever any of those fellows comes in, in order to have a recomendation signed, direct him first to take a bite of cheese and a mouthfull of the souergrou. If he swallows it with a good grace, put him down for a Heisterite, but, if, on the contrary, he hesitates, put him down for a Finlyite and turn him off. This would be my plan. Remember the great Mamouth Cheese used as a bate in Thos. Jefferson's time.

Mrs. Weidman and Jacob join in their respectfull complimants to Mrs. Greaff & self and all our freinds, &ca.

Yours respectfully,

/s/ Jno. Weidman

Mr. Charles Graff,
at the Corner of 6th & Arch Streets,
Philada.

p. Jno. Keensel 
Rec'd 1 Dec., answ'd same day.

[Manuscript Collection, Pennsylvania Folklife Society, Ursinus College]

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