

The Diaries of Sydney George Fisher

A MORE trustful generation of historical readers than that of the present day was once familiar with the name and fame of Sydney George Fisher (1856-1927), a prolific Philadelphia writer. In his forties, Fisher began to produce such works as *The True Benjamin Franklin*, *The True William Penn*, *The True Story of the American Revolution* and *The True Daniel Webster*. Fisher had his place as a historian, but his interpretations have been largely superseded by more recent writings. It is, in fact, quite possible that the value of his work may in time be considered of less significance than the rich store of source material contained in the unpublished diaries of his father.

The career of Sydney George Fisher (1808-1871), the diarist and father of the historian, was an obscure and unsuccessful one. Were it not for the lengthy series of diaries he kept from 1834 to 1871 his life would be totally forgotten. The countless hours which he spent, however, recording his thoughts on personalities and events, both local and national, produced a record for which historians will long be grateful, as they study his extraordinarily penetrating account.

From its pages the character of the diarist emerges with startling clearness. Scion of an aristocratic and notable merchant family of early Philadelphia, he had high regard for the respectability which such a background gave him. Deeply ingrained with a sense of his family's importance, Sydney George Fisher built his life and centered all his tastes on his concept of the gentleman. The profoundest praise he could bestow on any man was to say that he was a gentleman.

Parvenus, names new to society, people of unconventional manners, all merited his contempt and disgust. His opinion of the "lower orders" was poor indeed. "I always vote against the popular side on principle," wrote Fisher, because he did not believe that any cause which was popular with the vulgar elements of society could be right. American civilization, he was convinced, was being destroyed by the proletariat who had power only because the United States was a democracy. A great Anglophile, Fisher recorded "My hatred of

democracy is stronger than my love of country," and again, "Truly, as the newspapers say, we live in a favored country. The cold of Russia, the heat of Africa; drought, disease and democracy, make up a combination of blessings. . . ."

With all his prejudices and quirks, Sydney George Fisher was a Philadelphian of Philadelphians. After the early deaths of his parents, he and his two younger brothers, Henry and James, were brought up with loving care by a spinster aunt and inherited modest fortunes and ancestral farms in Maryland. It was to these supports that Fisher turned after being graduated from Dickinson College and after qualifying for the Philadelphia Bar in 1831.

Protected by his small income and temperamentally disinclined toward a professional life, Fisher at first pursued his legal career sporadically, but soon gave it up altogether, although at later times he would occasionally take a case to implement his income. "Luckily my fortune small as it is & my social position command respect from the mass," mused the diarist. He had ability and very well knew that he could advance in life as well as anyone, but somehow he could never get to it, and, in effect, dreamed his life away; "I cannot describe the strange feelings of unreality which I experience in my contemplation of existence—produced I suppose by my habits of reverie." The astonishing success of his brother Henry was a great source of worry to Fisher; he feared Henry would lose the spiritual qualities of his character by turning into "a mere businessman."

The proper pursuit for a man of his position, Fisher felt, was not business, but the country life of the gentleman farmer. Farming was one of his chief interests, and his visits to Mount Harmon, his farm on the Sassafrass River some twenty-five miles from Elkton, Maryland, constituted a much loved relaxation. Despite his hope that this farm would be the support of his family, it proved to be a serious drain on his resources because he never learned how to run it profitably.

Fisher's greatest pleasures were reading and the cultivation of the arts and social graces. He occasionally lectured before cultural groups and published poetry anonymously. Men of action who lacked his habit of study he characterized as "mere animals."

A certain detachment in his life from the bustle of the day, joined to an independency of thought and judgment, is reflected throughout

his diaries and lends originality to them. He had an unusual ability to view events objectively, although it must be admitted that he was not always consistent in this quality when the events struck too close to the core of his being.

Fisher admired few men. His descriptions of prominent persons are apt to be caustic, and they are just as apt to change over a period of years. His opinion of Van Buren in 1837, for example, was not high, but eleven years later he could write, "I wish the Democrats would take him for their candidate. He has ability, is now rich and conservative and is moderate in his views."

Despite a life of increasing disappointment and financial stringency, which warped his character and brought out selfish traits and a regrettable jealousy of his successful friends, a deep vein of sympathy remained to add warmth to his writings, which, while beautifully expressed, might otherwise have been too trenchant.

As his life neared its close, Fisher came to regard his diaries more and more highly. He had written them so that they could be read by others, but in his old age he reviewed their contents and edited them extensively. Many of his opinions he found were too extreme; some of his accounts concerned personal matters better forgotten. Page after page Fisher ripped out and destroyed. Despite this loss, the pages remaining in the seventy-nine volumes represent a monumental narrative of his life and opinions. Upon his death the diaries were left to his son, who, just before he died, gave them to R. Sturgis Ingersoll. In 1948 Mr. Ingersoll gave them to the Society.

Although the editors* hope to publish a number of installments of the diaries in this MAGAZINE from time to time, only a small portion of them can be selected for this purpose, and much of interest must necessarily be omitted. The first selection begins in 1834 with a reference to a previous diary which apparently has not been preserved. At this time, the reader finds Sydney George Fisher, a young bachelor, mourning the death of his brother, James Logan Fisher.

August 6, 1834 Yesterday looked over some of the last volume of my diary—kept for about two months. Was so much pleased with it, it recalled so vividly some interesting scenes of an interesting

* The Fisher diaries have been prepared for publication by the editorial staff of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

period of my life, that I thought it would be wise, were it only for the sake of securing to myself future enjoyment to begin another.

My last diary ended with an account of the first serious misfortune of my life. The death of my admirable and lamented brother James. My attachment to him was stronger than to any other and his loss for the first time in my life made me acquainted with real sorrow.

In April 20th, 1833 he sailed for Liverpool with his and my intimate friend Geo: Smith.¹ Henry² sailed on the same day for Havre. James travelled thro England, Scotland and Wales for several months. But neither his health nor spirits were much improved. In September he went to Paris, where the excitement, the novelty & gayety of the place, amused his mind & produced a most beneficial effect upon his health. After remaining a few weeks with George on the fashionable side of the river, he felt so much better that he went over to the students' quarter to resume his studies.³ William Gerhard⁴ was there, & by his influence & by his advice he commenced, in a position more advantageous & under better auspices perhaps than any other American enjoyed. But in the midst of all this, he was suddenly attacked by the scarlatina, which carried him off in three days.

Henry did not get to Paris in time to see him, but followed him to the grave, over which is a neat monument with a simple inscription, "Sacred to the memory of James Logan Fisher of Philadelphia who died at Paris, Octbr 3rd, 1833, aged 22 years." These are the words I believe, or to that effect.⁵ Henry returned in December and spent a

¹ George R. Smith of Philadelphia was a lifelong friend of the diarist.

² Henry Fisher (1814-1862) was S. G. Fisher's youngest brother. Shortly after being graduated from Princeton, Henry Fisher went to Le Havre to fit himself for a mercantile career at the house of Courant and Company. Returning to Philadelphia in 1835, he soon proved himself an outstanding businessman, but in amassing a fortune of over a million dollars virtually worked himself to death and died before his forty-eighth birthday. For information on the Fisher family, see Anna Wharton Smith, *Genealogy of the Fisher Family* (Philadelphia, 1896), and Sophia Cadwalader, *Recollections of Joshua Francis Fisher* (Boston, 1929).

³ Medical studies.

⁴ William Wood Gerhard (1809-1872) was graduated from Dickinson College and in 1830 obtained his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1831 he went to Paris to study. Gerhard later made a reputation through his study of typhus and became a prominent Philadelphia physician. *Dictionary of American Biography* (DAB).

⁵ The diary contains a photograph of the gravestone taken in 1861 from which the inscription can be read. A portrait of James Logan Fisher by Thomas Sully is owned by The Library Company of Philadelphia.

month with us. After such a severe affliction, he could not bear to remain for years abroad without seeing me.

He sailed a second time for Havre on the third of January. He was so advantageously situated in Courant's house, and enjoyed there so many advantages that it was undoubtedly the best thing he could do to return. We parted with much sorrow, I love him most affectionately, he is indeed my all in the world and I look forward to his return with impatience and anticipations of happiness from his society.

Let me notice briefly, the few incidents which occurred from the time of his departure until the present. A few slight memoranda are sufficient and will serve to recall them to my memory. The country was agitated by strong political excitement. Jackson had just executed the violent and unconstitutional measure of hostility against the Bank of U. S. of removing the public deposits, thus breaking the pledged faith of the nation, and obtaining complete control of the public money, to be used for the purpose of gaining partisans and strengthening the power of his party. I shared in the excitement. I could not witness the extreme corruption of the administration, the dangerous infatuation of the people, the constant appeals to the lowest passions of the mob, and the bankruptcy and distress caused by the outrageous course of the government without alarm and indignation. Those feelings remain, and I fear are long destined to be produced by the same causes, but at that time every one was deeply moved and the people on both sides were ready for anything. I wrote several pieces for the papers, and at a public meeting of the young men (on the 13th of March) made a speech.⁶ The meeting was very full and very much excited, I was interested in the subject and had prepared myself with care.

The speech suited the temper of the audience & of the hour & was successful. A committee was appointed, of which I was made chairman, to proceed to Washington & present the resolutions of the meeting to Congress.⁷ We went March 22/34. The resolutions were

⁶ Fisher was one of several who addressed a large public meeting of the Young Men of the City of Philadelphia at Musical Fund Hall. According to *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, Mar. 17, 1834, he spoke with "much force and eloquence."

⁷ The resolutions were of an anti-Jackson nature and blamed the distressed economic condition of the country on the removal of public deposits from the Bank of the United States.

presented in the House by Mr. Binney,⁸ in the Senate by Mr. Southard⁹ of N. Jersey, who both made appropriate speeches on the occasion. Mr. Forsyth¹⁰ of the Senate did us the honor to notice us, and laughed at us a good deal, bidding us go home and attend to the young ladies. I was sitting at the time within a few feet of him with some ladies in the gallery. We had a pleasant visit to Washington many prominent men calling to see us at our parlor in the hotel. Among them Mr. Clay, Mr. Calhoun, Preston,¹¹ Southard, etc. I called to see Webster at his lodgings & had some talk with him & several times on Calhoun. He was very affable & courteous & is a¹² delightful man, Calhoun. His manner and conversation, irresistibly impress one with the conviction that he is honest and sincere, and no plotting politician, but a chivalrous enthusiastic champion of the peculiar and unfortunate doctrines which he has undertaken to defend. He has large grey eyes, deep sunk under beetling brows, and his glance is the most penetrating that I ever encountered. His iron grey hair stands off, like the quills of the fretful porcupine, from his high expanded forehead, and tho his smile is singularly engaging, a life of excitement has deeply furrowed his face with the lines of thought and passion. His manner and appearance are those of a high bred gentleman, in spite of the negligence of his dress, which was a blue coat and gilt buttons, not very new or very clean, black stock, loose unfashionable looking blue pantaloons, and munroe boots. His mind is of a high order. Reasoning powers of great force, warmed by feeling and passion. He is a statesman, tho too metaphysical and refined as his doctrines of nullification sufficiently show, and the three speeches which he delivered last winter, are the best which were produced during a session, when subjects of the utmost importance, and an excitement unparalleled in this country, elicited a display of talents never before exhibited since the formation of our government.

⁸ Horace Binney (1780-1875), a leader of the Philadelphia Bar, had taken his seat in Congress a few months earlier as a member of the anti-Jackson party.

⁹ Samuel Lewis Southard (1787-1842) was strongly opposed to Jackson and the removal of the Federal deposits. *DAB*.

¹⁰ John Forsyth (1780-1841), Senator from Georgia and a Jackson supporter, was soon to be rewarded with the appointment of Secretary of State. *DAB*.

¹¹ William Campbell Preston (1794-1860), Senator from South Carolina, was an opponent of Jackson's. *DAB*.

¹² The paragraph down to this point was added on June 4, 1869, and replaces a page which was torn out.

I did not hear him speak, his delivery is bad I am told, and it is said that conversation is his forte. This I had an opportunity of enjoying on several occasions, and certainly nothing could be more interesting and striking. His manner is exceedingly gracious and cordial, not the mere formal civility and mechanical blandness of a man of the world, but in his voice, countenance and gesture, there is such an expression of heart and feeling that it [is] impossible to be with him without being strongly interested.

As a contrast to Calhoun I would oppose Clay, the veteran intriguer and political charlatan. He is undoubtedly a man of talents, energy and ambition. But I think his intellect is not of a very high order, and there is nothing noble or lofty in his character. [The foregoing is crossed out and the words "untrue and unjust" written over it.] He is incapable of very profound reasoning, depth of thought or extensive & original views. He is a keen debater, and it is said that on sudden occasions he utters bursts of declamatory eloquence which are very effective. He is a tall, thin man, with twinkling small grey eyes, a florid complexion, scanty sandy hair, and a wide mouth. The expression of his face is lively, intelligent and pleasing. His manner & appearance give one the impression that he is playing a part, and canvassing for popularity. This impression I received some years ago before I knew much of his character or thought at all on political subjects, when I met him & was introduced to him at a party in this city, and it was confirmed and strengthened by what I saw of him in Washington. I heard him make his speech which closed the debate on his resolutions in relation to the removal of the deposits, and tho I did not expect much, I was disappointed. He spoke two days, and his speech was prosing, wearisome and commonplace. No connected and convincing argument, no eloquence, nothing profound or striking, tho there were many attempts at sarcasm and much, I thought undignified personality. It was considered a failure by all, & his friends said that it was impossible to judge by it, of his powers. But such of his speeches as I have read, are much of the same character, and I cannot have a high opinion of the intellect of a man who *could*, particularly after long preparation, utter so much that was mediocre, trifling and weak. He was the leader of the opposition in the Senate during the last stormy session, & it is unfortunate I think that he was so. Independently of the circumstance of his having been the

candidate opposed to Jackson, of his being at the time the person likely to be run as the most prominent of the candidates of the opposition, which in itself was enough to cast a doubt, or rather to destroy all confidence in his sincerity and disinterestedness; his violent abuse, constant sarcasm and coarse personality, tho well merited, were undignified in a senator, and injured his cause both in Congress and with [a line torn out] many both in public and private life. It was thro his instigation, and partly in consequence of a threat from him, that if it did not accede to his wishes, it could not look to his support for a recharter, that the Bank of the U.S. was induced to apply for a renewal of its charter at the time it did, and thus to enter the field as a political champion, thereby justifying to a certain extent the charges of its enemies. He wished to wield its vast influence in the promotion of his own designs. . . . [but] to get rid of the curse of Jacksonism I would vote for him, yet I would do so with great reluctance and should prefer any other of our eminent public men.

I was introduced to Webster, & had a short conversation with him, and heard him speak for a few minutes on presenting a memorial. He is a great man. With an intellect at once clear & logical stored with knowledge & alert and practical from the experience of a life of active exertion, he possesses at the same time a certain loftiness of character, which commands respect. In his oratory there is nothing dazzling or brilliant, but its character is elevated, severe, sober and argumentative. His is the eloquence of reason. But however profound, well arranged and convincing his arguments may be, in his speeches there is much more than mere reasoning. A certain nobility of thought & feeling, an elevated patriotism, the anger, the enthusiasm, the scorn of a great mind, are perpetually flashing forth when the occasion calls for them, and over all is shed the glowing radiance of a rich imagination, elevating and warming, and adding the charm of metaphor and poetical illustration to his style. His delivery is very dignified and imposing and his appearance is very expressive of his character, and just what one would expect. He is of the middle height, rather stout, with small limbs & delicate extremities. His carriage & air are calm and severe & his manner graceful & gentlemanly. Such a face & head I never saw—a jutting, broad & lofty forehead, black & beetling brows, immense, blazing dark eyes, deep sunk, a large mouth, the smile of which at times is bland and pleasing

enough, but when curled in scorn or anger, and assisted by the glaring orbs above, gives to its possessor the expression of an enraged demon, conscious of his power—these, together with a dark sallow complexion and black hair, complete an appearance the most striking that I ever saw. His voice is in accordance with the rest, deep toned & powerful but not harsh. His dress is that of a gentleman, always clean, a little careless, and composed of dark rich colors. He occupies the most eminent and influential position in the country, because he is the leader of a great state, & perhaps of more than one, & has the reputation of possessing the most powerful intellect & being the most eloquent & efficient orator in Congress. Many however doubt the soundness and purity of his political and personal integrity, and he is so reckless of money, that notwithstanding the immense emoluments of his profession, he is said to be involved in debt.

Preston is a young member of the Senate from S. Carolina, and was the crack orator of the opposition last session. He is a tall, large boned, muscular man, heavy and rather awkward, with a red face and a red wig. His features are coarse, and his whole appearance neither that of a man of talents nor entirely of a gentleman. He is however a man of no ordinary talents, tho not at all of the first order, or to be ranked for a moment with such men as Webster and Calhoun. His reasoning powers are second rate, his mind is not grasping or extensive in its views, but he has a very rich & vivid imagination and is master of a fluent, passionate and striking style of oratory full of fine tropes, & harmonious sentences, and appealing constantly to the passions, which make his speeches very effective occasionally in the delivery, tho not capable of producing any impression when read. On the whole I was not much pleased with him, the animal predominated too much, there was nothing elegant or refined about him, and tho exceedingly gracious, it was that mechanical man of the world civility, which means nothing, and his manners were vulgar. I saw a good deal of him at Washington, as he presented our memorial & dined with us several times, and afterwards in Philad, where he came to speak and make converts to nullification.

I should not omit to mention my presentation *at court*. Leaming Smith¹³ and myself went to see the "old Hero" and were introduced

¹³ T. Leaming Smith was one of the Young Men of the City of Philadelphia who accompanied Fisher to present the resolutions.

by Col. Watmough.¹⁴ The house is a fine one, but the furniture and appearance of everything inside, is tawdry, dirty & vulgar—not to compare in neatness, elegance & comfort to any gentleman's houses in this city. We were shown up by a shabby Irish porter, called Jemmy, notorious for his impudence. The room was full when we entered, but in a short time the crowd went away, and Smith & myself were left alone with the old hero. It was about 12 in the morning. He was sitting in his *business* room, dressed in a rusty & dirty suit of black, with black worsted stockings & old shoes. His whole appearance was common & anything but that of a gentleman. He greeted us very graciously, shook hands, & we sat down. I was delighted with the accident which left us alone with him, and told him that if he was not engaged it would give us pleasure to sit with him for a little while. He said he was very glad to see us, & that he would light his pipe, & then we would have some conversation. The servant brought a pipe, "The old Roman" put his heels against the mantelpiece, & commenced smoking, and we were in the midst of a very comfortable chat when the door flew open & in rushed a red faced, fanatic looking methodist preacher, who walked up to the President & without bow or salutation of any kind, poked a letter & some papers in his face.

"What's this, sir, are you the person whose name is signed to this letter," said the president, "I never subscribe to anything, make it a rule or I should be pestered to death. I suppose it's some book you want me to subscribe to."

"No Sir," said the fellow "something better than any book—it is the Church of God."

This was said with great vehemence, & made Jackson stare. He replied however very blandly, "Aye sir, but all churches claim to be the church of God."

The man encouraged by his condescension, now placed himself in an attitude & with a raised voice and outstretched arm cried—

"General Jackson, are you a believer in Jesus Christ?" "Certainly, sir" said the president very mildly, "I am a Christian and my mother

¹⁴ Col. John Goddard Watmough (1793-1861) was a Philadelphia militia officer and a member of Congress. Frank Willing Leach, "Old Philadelphia Families," *The North American*, 1912; hereafter cited as Leach.

was before me, and all Christians are obliged to believe in Jesus Christ."

"Then sir you should practice His precepts."

"Humph"

"There is great corruption in Church & State."

"No, no, not in State, I deny that" mumbled the "venerable chief magistrate" shaking his head.

The preacher had now got into the middle of the floor, & went on with great violence.

"General Jackson you are the great man of this nation. I feel proud to be in your presence. I come before you like Paul before Agrippa, like 'somebody I don't know who,' before *Nero*," and a great deal more stuff of the same kind, which Jackson recd. with the greatest calmness and civility, saying every now & then pleasant things, when in the midst of the fellow's speech, the door again opened, and Jemmy came up with the card of some gentleman who he said "wished to see the president alone." The preacher did not stop immediately, and the rascally porter, standing behind Jackson's chair, looked at us, pointed to the methodist, and made all sorts of grimaces. Indeed I could hardly keep my countenance during the whole scene—it was so amusing, altho I was a little indignant too. We got up and made our bows, & went away, Jemmy saying to us as we left the hall, "I wish the General would tell me not to let them sort o fellows in—they're always a'bothering him with their damned prachements."

Such is the man whom a free and *enlightened* people have twice elected for their ruler. We can excuse the idolatry of a people towards such a man as Napoleon, whose wonderful genius and brilliant achievements were enough to dazzle the imagination & vanquish the judgment, or for a Washington, who was as good as he was great, and whose services to his country were immense; but when we see a nation so infatuated, as in spite of all evidence and all reason, in spite of the grossest mismanagement, the vilest fraud & corruption, and actual & extensive suffering produced, to worship such a creature as Andrew Jackson, ignorant, passionate and imbecile, without a striking or estimable trait, the tool of low adventurers & swindlers, and whose only service was the victory of New Orleans in which no

military skill or genius was displayed, it is enough to destroy all hope in the power of the people for self government, and to dissipate forever the fanciful dream of republicanism. Jackson is the head of the democratic party, in other words, the Chieftain of the lower orders.

In every country there must be a mob, a canaille population, without property, without education, utterly degraded & anxious to promote disturbance & revolution, because these cannot place them in a worse situation, & may place them in a better, and because scenes of violence afford opportunities for the gratification of their brutal passions. This class must increase, with the prosperity of the country, and even in the United States, where it is much smaller than anywhere else, if to the class who may fairly be called the mob, is added, the number of those, who from gross ignorance, self interest, or recklessness would be most apt to take the wrong side, the result would be, that the majority of the people, in whose hands is lodged the whole political power of the nation, are unfit to possess that power, and are ever liable to lead on to anarchy & revolution by designing and artful demagogues.

But supposing we escape this, their political and social influence is not the less injuriously felt. Felt, as at the present moment, in the debasement of political honesty, the destruction of honorable ambition, the rise of demagogues & swindlers to power, the corruption of administration, and the tyranny of a *degraded* public opinion. The mob are unable to form a high standard of excellence, and are easily blinded & deluded. Education, talents, high moral worth are no recommendations to them. They elect men more nearly resembling themselves & whose qualities they can understand and appreciate. The low-minded & ignorant get power, they seek it for the sake of its emoluments, and use it, to gratify the feelings and please the prejudices of the vulgar & to fill their own pockets. Nothing is done with reference to the wishes or opinions of the educated classes. Hence the low and degraded character of the majority of our public men, hence the popularity of Jackson, and the over-bearing influence of the gang of swindlers & adventurers by whom he is surrounded, hence the war against the bank, and the cry against the rich & the "aristocrats," hence the enormous bribery & fraud exhibited in the post office, etc., hence the prostitution, vileness and scurrility of the press, hence

riots, political judges, judicial demagogues, electioneering, office-holders, etc, and the host of abuses with which the country is filled.

[The account of a visit to Stenton follows a hiatus in the diary caused when many pages were torn out by Fisher.]

Found Aunt Logan¹⁵ at home, Algernon¹⁶ out. She was as ever, very agreeable & gave us a cordial reception. She is a model of an old lady, a fine mind highly cultivated, a most excellent and benevolent heart, great liberality of sentiment & nobleness of feeling, and a perfect lady of the old school in her manners. She is very old, nearly 80 I suppose but her regular & temperate life has preserved her free from disease, and she enjoys good health & spirits. Her old age "is as a lusty winter frosty but kindly."

We spoke of politics and the character of Jefferson. Dr. Logan was his intimate friend or rather his blind tool. He was frequently at Stenton as was Washington, and many other of the leading men of the time. Notwithstand[ing] Dr. Logan's silly & romantic democratic notions, & his intimacy with Jefferson, the justness of Aunt Logan's mind & her truth & candour were sufficient notwithstanding these influences to make her revere Washington, & despise Jefferson, as a hypocrite, & demagogue. She told us that she perfectly recollects hearing him tell Dr. Logan of Washington's anger on reading some attacks on his character in Freneau's paper, which it afterwards appeared had been written by Jefferson himself, tho he was at the head of the cabinet at the time. This puts me in mind of a circumstance I heard yesterday from Aunt Logan, which it is well enough to record, as there is not the slightest doubt about its truth. Among Washington's papers was found an old newspaper with some pieces in it, containing violent abuse of his character & motives. On the margin was written words to this effect in Washington's handwriting. "Would it have been believed, that Dr. Benjn Rush, a man so trusted by me, to whom I so entirely gave my confidence, should have been guilty of traducing me so grossly." The family here got to know of this having been found and wrote so earnestly for the paper, that it was delivered to them. So that old Dr. Rush so much vener-

¹⁵ Aunt Logan was the celebrated Deborah Norris who married Dr. George Logan, a brother of Fisher's grandmother, Mrs. Thomas (Sarah Logan) Fisher.

¹⁶ George and Deborah Logan had three children: Albanus Charles, Gustavus George, and Algernon Sydney.

ated by the good Philadelphians, was an old rascal after all. I am glad to find nature vindicated by truth, for I always thought it very strange that a man who enjoyed so very high a reputation, should have sons so inferior intellectually & morally.¹⁷

Aunt Logan saw much of many of the distinguished men of the revolution and the last century. She appears almost to live in those good old times of which she is so fond of talking, & has employed many years of her life in collecting & preserving memorials of them, particularly of the early history of Penna.; which she has been the better enabled to do, as all the papers of James Logan, the secretary of Wm Penn, & his deputy in his absence have come into her possession. She has copied all his letters which fill several large volumes, arranged in the most perfect manner all his papers, and written down her own recollections of different individuals, & of what she heard from them.¹⁸

Stenton is worthy of its inmate; it is more than a hundred years old, built by James Logan in the old style, and is a beautiful place surrounded by magnificent old trees. The drives up to the house, the view back, & that splendid avenue of immense hemlock spruce trees are very fine. The house is large & convenient & filled with furniture as old fashioned as itself & its owner, and there are so many interesting associations connected with the place that I never go there without strong interest.

November 4, 1836 Election Day. Thanks to the registry law the voting is quiet & orderly, partly also owing to the absence of any strong excitement. Cold, raw weather, with a cloudy sky and easterly wind. Swift¹⁹ bought me my stock for 63 yesterday, today it is 64.50. Rode out the Ridge road as far as the laurel hill cemetery. They are building the wall & will make a handsome place of it.²⁰ The situation

¹⁷ Five of Benjamin Rush's sons were alive at this time, including Richard, James and John. Richard Rush (1780-1859) was distinguished as a diplomat and statesman, but he sided with Jackson on the Bank question, an unforgivable action in Fisher's opinion. Dr. James Rush (1786-1869) married wealthy Phoebe Anne Ridgway with whom Fisher was not on speaking terms. James Rush left one of the most famous and eccentric wills known to Philadelphia legal history. *DAB*. John Rush (1777-1837) was insane for many years. George W. Corner, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush* (Princeton, 1948), 369.

¹⁸ Deborah Logan's diaries and historical writings are now the property of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁹ Joseph Swift, broker, 256 Chestnut Street.

²⁰ The first interment in Laurel Hill Cemetery took place on Oct. 19, 1836.

is very beautiful; it was formerly the country seat of Jos: Sims. My horse was very unruly.

November 5, 1836 The returns from the interior are favorable to Harrison and the whigs are full of hope. Where there have been Van Buren majorities, it is satisfactory to observe, that the majorities for delegates to the Convention are much less than those on the electoral tickets, showing that the infamous doctrines of Dallas's letter²¹ are disapproved by many of his party. Pennsylvania is safe enough I think, and the demagogues can do but little harm even if the State goes for Van Buren. In the evening went to Fishers²² Wister²³ party. Very handsome and agreeable. Davis the author of Jack Downing's letters there.²⁴

November 7, 1836 Clear, mild, delightful day. The returns from the counties are favorable, the convention is considered safe, and the U.S. Bk. Stk. [United States Bank stock] has consequently gone up to \$115 from 110. The presidential election is of little consequence, and the contemptible conduct of the whigs in nominating so ordinary a man as Harrison merely to catch the populace with the prestige of military fame & that none of the brightest which belongs to him, has rendered very many indifferent as to the success of Van Buren, who is a man of talents, property and it is said a gentleman. But it is very satisfactory to observe that the people have intelligence enough to perceive the paltry sophistry & dangerous tendency of Dallas's doctrines, and virtue enough to condemn their infamous dishonesty. It gives me more confidence in our institutions than anything which has happened in our politics for a long time.

²¹ George Mifflin Dallas of Philadelphia shocked conservative-minded people by a letter he wrote on July 7, 1836, to the Democratic Corresponding Committee of Smithfield, Bradford County, Pa. His letter reviewed the history of the Bank of the United States from a Jacksonian point of view, and expressed the belief that the charter recently granted to the Bank by Pennsylvania could be revoked. *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, Sept. 8, 1836.

²² Joshua Francis Fisher (1807-1873) was a first cousin of S. G. Fisher, who always refers to him in his diaries simply as Fisher. J. F. Fisher was much interested in local history and was a prominent member of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²³ Wistar parties derive from the intellectual salon established by Dr. Caspar Wistar in 1800. After his death in 1818 they were continued by the Wistar Association, whose membership is drawn from the American Philosophical Society.

²⁴ Charles Augustus Davis (1795-1867), the author of *The Letters of J. Downing, Major, Downingville Militia, Second Brigade, to his old friend Mr. Dwight* (New York, 1834), was opposed to the Jackson administration.

November 8, 1836 The favorable news of the election has sent all the stocks up. Unlucky that I did not buy more as I have about \$1000 uninvested in Bank. Walked about town with Fisher, paying visits; this leaving cards is a great bore, but must be done. Went with him to see Miss Bell. Never knew her before, quite a nice girl, with a large fortune. At home in the afternoon. Spent part of the evening at Geo: Smith's with himself, his wife & Mr. Roberts²⁵ very pleasantly. When Henry came home he brought news of the complete success of the whig Convention, the returns as far as known show Harrison 4000 ahead, without a doubt of his success in Penna. This is good news indeed and most unexpected to both parties. Henry says that nothing could exceed the delight with which the news was received at the exchange when announced. The crowd all shook hands & seemed half beside themselves with joy. It is certainly a very great triumph & calculated to inspire confidence in the institutions of the country & the capacity of the people to govern. Dallas's nefarious schemes will be signally defeated, & himself & associates overwhelmed with the hatred & contempt not only of our party but of his own, for to his letter we owe our success almost entirely. It is said that the Van Buren men speak of him now with the utmost execration. He well deserved it, but I pity his family which is large, he poor, with scarcely any practice & dependent on office & the hopes of it for support. The office-holders, and leading men of "the party" whose maintenance & hopes of advancement depended entirely on Van Buren's success must feel wofully chagrined. The most important part of the triumph is the security of the Convention, which will prevent those radical & dangerous changes in the Constitution, judiciary establishment etc contemplated by the jacobins. Should Van Buren be elected, the opposition is so strong in numbers, influence and respectability, that he, a cautious & shrewd man, will hardly venture to propose any dangerous or disorganising measures. As to the politicians who head the two parties there is but little difference between them as to motives, much now however, in talents, education & station and it is a question whether a democratic party in power with such a man at their head and a powerful conservative party in opposition to keep them in order, is not safer than a conservative party with Harrison for president, with a strong

²⁵ Hugh Roberts, father of Mary Roberts who married George R. Smith. Leach.

radical opposition. The conservatives would not resort to disorganizing measures, popular appeals to the mob, and violent outrage to gain their point, which is the danger in this country, whereas the radicals are always reckless and desperate. Whoever may be successful, we have happily every reason to expect order, tranquility & prosperity for some years to come, which after the excitement, alarm and violence of the last three or four years is a very agreeable prospect.

November 9, 1836 Still delightful weather. Read law till 12. Went to the exchange. The news last night of Harrison's success proves too good to be true. Reports are in town that Van Buren is 3000 ahead, and some counties yet to be heard from. The administration men consequently are elated & the U.S. Stk. down again to 116. The report however comes in rather a questionable shape, and the truth cannot be known till complete returns arrive. At the worst Van Buren's majority cannot be more than 5000, which is a great triumph, as his party counted and a great many bet largely on 20,000. The Convention will however no doubt be ours and Mr. Dallas's doctrines be rebuked & put down which is the important matter.

November 11, 1836 The pressure in the money market continues as severe as ever, and Dallas's letter has destroyed confidence in Europe in our securities, letters having been received as Henry was informed, returning some U.S. Bk. Stk. as unsalable. Mr. Atherton²⁶ has entrusted \$20,000 to Henry to invest for him, Henry to receive 25 pr ct on the profits. I am glad of this. It shows confidence, well merited, in Henry's judgment & prudence & is liberal enough in Atherton also. Dined alone. At home all the eveng reading, making up ac/cs etc. Think that in two or three years I shall have from my property about \$2500 a year, little enough to be sure but still sufficient for comfort & independence as long as I am unmarried. I have now about \$2000.

November 12, 1836 Mild, soft weather. Wrote to Engle,²⁷ explaining why I did not send him money for investment in western lands as I had intended. My reasons were because it was impossible

²⁶ Humphrey Atherton, father of Sarah Ann Atherton who married Henry Fisher in 1837.

²⁷ Peter Hill Engle (formerly of Delaware County, Pa.), a lawyer from Dubuque, was speaker of the Wisconsin territorial Assembly in 1836.

to buy drafts on the West in consequence of the deranged state of the money market, and because stocks are so low that very profitable investments may be made here now, so that I thought it better to wait. Went to Gerhard's²⁸ office, where I found a Dubuque newspaper, sent by Engle containing the announcement of his election to the legislature. He went there last June! In a new country where there is much to be done & few to do it, every man is of use, and abilities such as Engle's have scope for exercise & are immediately appreciated. Three years ago, there were no white inhabitants in the country where Dubuque is situated.

November 25, 1836 Came home from Mount Harmon after a week pleasantly spent. With the exception of one rainy day the weather was delightful, and I was walking about, planting trees, pruning & making my observations of the state of the farm, nearly the whole of every day. Found that Stephen had planted some hemlock spruce and Buttonwoods in the yard, before the old quarter. Planted the pear trees in the garden, the apples in the orchard, & the forest trees around the house, where there are now nearly enough. The corn turns out a poor crop which was to be expected after the long drought of last summer, there will be about 700 bushels, had the season been favorable there would have been 1200. The oats also failed. The prices however are so high that the rent of this will be larger than of any previous year. On the whole the farm is improving very well.

December 1, 1836 Clear, pleasant day. Occupied all the morning in arranging my books in my new bookcase. I have not a great many, but buy as I want which I prefer to purchasing a large library at once. I then have the pleasure of constant acquisition, do not lose the interest of the money, & get the best editions as they appear.

December 2, 1836 Clear, cold, delightful winter day. At home reading till 12. Rode out to Wakefield.²⁹ Yorick behaved very badly, balked, reared, plunged, etc. so that I was nearly 3 hours getting there. Must give him to a jockey to break, as such capers are very unpleasant. No one who is not a professed domitor equorum ought to buy a colt.

²⁸ Benjamin Gerhard, a lawyer, brother of William Gerhard.

²⁹ Wakefield, the property of S. G. Fisher's uncle, William Logan Fisher, was located near Stenton.

December 4, 1836 Sunday, clear, mild delightful day. Took a ride around the point road. Much to my surprise Yorick behaved perfectly well. Called at Harrisons,³⁰ Walns,³¹ Mrs. Read's,³² Athertons and Mrs. Ch: Kuhns.³³ Met N. P. Willis and his wife,³⁴ he bowed to me across the street, did not recognise him at first, as I had not seen him since he went to Europe 5 or 6 years ago. It is a great pity that a fellow of such fine talents should have so little principle. His foreign reputation however will I doubt not get him into society.

December 6, 1836 Clear, fine winter's day. Not too cold. Willis came in in the morning. Did not much like his appearance. More of the dandy than the gentleman in it. He talks however extremely well, very much in the style he writes, and his manner is very quiet and easy. Took a ride round the point road. Dined at 4 alone. Henry at Atherton's. Read till 9, then went to a party at Chapman's.³⁵ Found Mrs. Read, Sally Waln,³⁶ Mrs. Butler³⁷ Mrs. Wadsworth³⁸ & one or two others that I care about meeting there. The rooms were full tho not crowded, some strangers & some *strange faces*. Mrs. Read and her coterie I find have taken up Willis quite violently and are exerting all their influence to get him & his wife visited & invited. This is amusing. It really seems as tho a good moral character or reputation was of very little use in these times. One constantly meets persons in society who are notoriously destitute of principle and are branded with the most opprobrious epithets by those very people who receive them in their houses. Before Willis went abroad he was cut by every one both in Boston & here. He has returned with a foreign reputation both good & bad and with money enough got with his wife to enable him to pay his debts & relieve him from the necessity of borrowing

³⁰ George Harrison was an uncle of Joshua Francis Fisher and served as his guardian, leaving him in due course a large fortune.

³¹ William Waln, a son of Nicholas Waln, the noted Quaker. Leach.

³² Mrs. George C. Read of 11 Portico Square, the wife of a naval captain.

³³ Wife of Charles Kuhn (1785-1842). Leach.

³⁴ Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806-1867) was a distinguished journalist, poet, editor and dramatist of the day. His wife was an Englishwoman, Mary Stace. *DAB*.

³⁵ Dr. Nathaniel Chapman (1780-1853) was a favorite physician of Philadelphia's wealthy class. His wife was Rebecca Biddle, a daughter of Col. Clement Biddle. *DAB*.

³⁶ Sarah Waln, daughter of William Waln, later married Benjamin Chew Willcocks.

³⁷ Frances Anne Kemble (1809-1893), English actress and authoress, came to America in 1832, and in 1834 married wealthy Pierce Butler of Philadelphia. They separated in 1846 and were divorced three years later. *DAB*.

³⁸ Wife of William Wadsworth.

where he does not mean to pay; and in addition he is very agreeable, has seen much, is full of talent of the lighter order, & has a great deal to say & a very pleasant way of saying it of things in Europe. So his Charlatanism, his impudence, his puppyism, his dishonesty, etc etc are forgotten, and certain people who live only for amusement & vanity are trying to make him the fashion. I should not be surprised if they succeed, at any rate it will be some fun to watch their operations.

December 13, 1836 At 9 went to Mrs Reads. Pretty full party, several strangers there. Willis and his wife there. Very few persons paid them any attention. Mrs. Read's enthusiasm about them is quite ridiculous, & every one laughs at her except those who behave as foolishly. Talked to Sally Ingersoll,³⁹ Mrs Kuhn, Mrs Blight⁴⁰ & Mrs Butler who looked very beautiful. There was some good singing & music. Willis showed me a book of autographs which he had lent Mrs Read, some of them of very distinguished persons, such as Wellington, Talleyrand, Tom Moore, Canova, etc etc; among them a note of my old friend Bolivar, nephew of the South American hero, who is now in Europe & I suppose something of a lion. Spoke yesterday to Hammel, a jockey, to ride my horse & cure him of his bad tricks, as I am tired of it. He rode him today, & reports that he balked once only & thinks that in a few days he can break him entirely. Home at 12.

December 14, 1836 This evening Bob Walsh⁴¹ came in to announce to me his engagement to Miss Patison of Troy, a very pretty girl whom he met last summer at Saratoga, & who with her mother & sister have been here for some weeks. Her father is very rich, and the family a very good one. I offered him my congratulations with great sincerity. I have known him intimately all my life, & always liked him very much. He has very good talents & great amiability & good feeling. His position for a long time has been most harassing & unfortunate, & this sudden & great change will be the more delightful to him from the contrast. His good luck comes all of a heap, for Mr.

³⁹ Wife of Harry Ingersoll, who was a son of Charles Jared Ingersoll (1782-1862). S. G. Fisher was later to marry Harry Ingersoll's sister Elizabeth.

⁴⁰ There were two Mrs. Blights: Maria Blight (1793-1865) who married her cousin George Blight (*d.* 1834); and Julia Fulton (*d.* 1848), a daughter of Robert Fulton, who married Charles Blight (1794-1864). Leach.

⁴¹ Robert M. Walsh, a son of the distinguished journalist and literary figure.

Biddle⁴² today made him his private secretary, with a salary of \$1200—much more than he ever had before, so that he will have the satisfaction of not being dependent entirely on his wife. Mr. Biddle's two letters,⁴³ the one giving an account of the manner in which the new charter of the Bank was obtained from Penna.; the other on the currency, explaining the causes of the present scarcity of money, & exposing the absurd measures of the government in matters of finance & particularly with reference to the execution of the distribution law and the new treasury order prohibiting anything but specie to be taken in payment for the public lands, have excited much attention & I think will do good. They are distinguished by a great clearness of statement and conclusiveness of argument, the style is simple, elegant and luminous, making a difficult subject perfectly comprehensible and showing with great force the miserable folly of unprincipled and ignorant men, to whom "the democracy" have given power to meddle in matters which they do not understand. Unfortunately these letters are marred by an exhibition of arrogance, presumption and self complacency, by petty sarcasm and abuse, which however well deserved are exceedingly undignified and in very bad taste. Biddle is certainly a very able man. He is an admirable financier and an elegant scholar; he is also a gentleman, and his calmness, self-control, and firmness during his long contest with Jackson contrasted strongly with the vulgarity, coarseness & violence of his adversaries. He has triumphed, and with undisputed control of the Bank, of all its immense operations and capital, united to the influence of his name & character, is now perhaps the most powerful individual in the country. So much the more would dignity, courtesy and forbearance become him. His "*Mr* Jackson" and "the question shall be tried," etc in his letters are unworthy of himself, his position and his subject. The severest invective he could use is a simple statement of facts; his power is well known, he should seek to conceal it; the career of the Bank directed by him; an admirable currency created & sustained by him; and the present distress & confusion now that the Bank is no longer connected with the government are his best eulogy—he need not praise himself. He however omits no oppor-

⁴² Nicholas Biddle (1786–1844), president of the Bank of the United States.

⁴³ Biddle's second letter to John Quincy Adams, dated Nov. 11, 1836, appeared in *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* on the same day as this diary entry. The letter took up nearly the entire first page of the newspaper.

tunity of exhibiting his egotism and consciousness of importance. His manner in society is that of a man supremely satisfied with himself, he has built a country house on the Delaware,⁴⁴ an exact imitation of the Bank in Chesnut Street,⁴⁵ and his Princeton oration⁴⁶ & these two letters are also full of evidences of the same weakness, which one is surprised to find united with so much strength. There is to be a large party at his house on Monday, I have observed that after any triumph or occasion in which he has appeared conspicuously before the public, Mrs. Biddle gives a party.

December 19, 1836 Went in the evening to Mrs N. Biddle's party. Did not get there till after 10 o'clock. Rooms somewhat crowded and dancing on the carpets. Mary Kuhn⁴⁷ was there, looking very well. Her first appearance. She has no beauty, but a mild amiable face, soft and graceful manner, great amiability & sweetness will be sufficient to make her a favorite. Willis & his wife were there, and received attentions from certain people, who make themselves ridiculous by the manner in which they speak about him. Mr Biddle was in very high spirits and extremely gracious. I was detained late by being obliged to attend Miss Car: Willing⁴⁸ to her carriage. She was with Mrs Tom Willing⁴⁹ who was engaged in a late tete a tete with Willis & was the last person in the room. Got home at 2 oclk. So much for the first dance of the season. Rather stupid. How could it be otherwise with our society. We have some married women certainly who are interesting, but of young ladies very few whose character and qualities are sufficiently elevated to induce a young man to exert himself to please, or who indeed can properly appreciate such exertion.

December 22, 1836 Luckily my fortune small as it is & my social position command respect from the mass. I must look for my enjoyments to domestic happiness, the intercourse & good opinion of

⁴⁴ Andalusia, formerly the property of his wife's family, was remodeled and enlarged by Nicholas Biddle. It is now the residence of Biddle's great-grandson, Charles J. Biddle.

⁴⁵ The Second Bank of the United States, later the Custom House, and now the home of the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation.

⁴⁶ Delivered at Nassau Hall on commencement day, Sept. 30, 1835.

⁴⁷ A daughter of Hartman Kuhn, Mary Kuhn later married her cousin Hartman, a son of Charles Kuhn. Leach.

⁴⁸ Miss Caroline Willing (1817-1860) was a daughter of Richard Willing; she later married Dr. Edward Peace of Philadelphia. *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Matilda Lee Carter of Virginia married Thomas Moore Willing in 1831. *Ibid.*

my friends, & to such occupations as are suited to my own tastes and intellectual bias.

December 25, 1836 In the evng read parts of Raumer's England,⁵⁰ that greatest of all countries, which I hope yet to see. His account of its grandeur, wealth and splendor, pervading comfort, refinement, happiness & moral elevation, agree with those of all other travellers, and make one repine that his lot is cast anywhere else. No wonder that Englishmen are proud of their country, no wonder even that there is something of contempt in their manner towards foreigners, *when abroad*, since in everything they see, the immeasurable superiority of their native land must be suggested to their minds. Americans can have no strong national feeling. We have no past, with its thousand recollections, associations and monuments. We have no distinct national character, but our population is almost as varied in its traits as the inhabitants of the different nations of Europe. And then our territory is so vast, and the interests of its parts so distinct and often so conflicting; and we are poor, and coarse and unrefined, and what with slavery, and southernism and Yankeeism, and Western barbarism, and Lynch law, and mob law and democracy, there are so many things to disgust & feel ashamed of, that I really think the true way is to insist on our claim of relationship to England & feel proud of her glory and greatness, and keep up our complacency, in that way for the next hundred years, when if there is no civil war, or servile war, or agrarian war, & if Railroads and steam engines go on increasing, we may have something to brag of ourselves.

December 31, 1836 For the two last days the weather has been that of "lusty winter," clear and cold, but not too cold. Have walked and visited in the morning, & passed the evng reading. Hammel came to say he thought my horse was now broken of his bad habits; he has been riding him for two weeks. So I thought I would try him. In a ride of half an hour he balked twice & bolted into Powell's stable yard, reared, plunged and exhibited every indication of a devilish temper. Told Hammel he might sell him for what he could & keep all over \$150.

⁵⁰ Friederich Ludwig Georg von Raumer, *England in 1835: Being a Series of Letters Written to Friends in Germany, During a Residence in London and Excursions into the Provinces*. Translated from the German by Sarah Austin and H. E. Lloyd. 3 volumes. London, 1836.

January 6, 1837 Delightful winter weather still. The season so far has been exceedingly pleasant, some compensation for the horrors of last winter, when the snow & ice were 3 feet thick in the streets 'till March. In the eveng went to Mrs Sergeant's⁵¹ ball. Very handsome affair. Mrs. Butler was superb in a gold turban and dress of maroon velvet. Such a costume well suits her magnificent style of beauty. She is certainly the most beautiful woman here, tho a little faded. Her manner is very gracious, and perfectly simple & unaffected. She never seems in the slightest degree conscious of her appearance, & has I think more sense than people generally give her credit for.

January 9, 1837 Reading, writing, walking in the morning. After dinner Stewardson came in, then Turner⁵² of the Navy. Sat till 8 oclk talking of various matters. Turner has seen a good deal but is a bore. He was a member of the mess which Willis was invited to join, & with whom he cruised about the Meditteraneum for six months. Turner stated the truth of some things which happened during the cruise, upon which were founded some stories very much to Willis's disadvantage, but which like many others were much exaggerated. I know enough however, to convince me that tho a fellow of great cleverness & brilliancy, and of amiable generous impulses to a certain extent, he is destitute of moral principle & the delicate sense of honor which should mark a gentleman. This evening Mrs. Dallas⁵³ has a ball. After some consideration we sent refusals. I think that Dallas's letter in keeping as it is with his general conduct & whole career, should prevent anyone, who thinks of him & it, as I do, from going to his house and accepting his hospitality.⁵⁴ The doctrines of his letter are false, illegal & infamously dishonest. I believe that he thought them so when he wrote it, and that notwithstanding his knowledge that they were untrue & of dangerous tendency, he published them solely to advance his own interests. Believing this I joined in the universal expression of execration & contempt which the letter produced; and thinking as I do, having spoken of him as I have,

⁵¹ Mrs. John Sargeant was Margaretta Watmough before her marriage in 1813.

⁵² Thomas Turner (1808-1883) was made a rear admiral in 1868. This identification is based on a note provided by the late Mrs. Charles E. Ingersoll in 1929.

⁵³ Mrs. George Mifflin Dallas, who before her marriage was Sophia Chew Nicklin.

⁵⁴ S. G. Fisher in time sufficiently changed his attitude toward Dallas to permit his becoming a frequent visitor in the Dallas home.

I cannot bear the idea of going to a party at his house, or of accepting any civilities from him. Many however, who were quite as violent as myself are going; they do not like to make him an enemy, since Van Buren is in power & he will probably be rewarded.⁵⁵ It is perhaps foolish & impolitic to carry out in this way my feelings and opinions upon such a subject. I know that it is a dangerous thing to appear to elevate yourself above the intellectual or moral standard of society. You immediately become the mark & generally the victim of all those who are scandalized by your superiority. Nothing is so vindictive as the outraged vanity or self-love of men. There is however so much satisfaction in the consciousness of having done right, of having obeyed the impulse of your own moral sense, that it is worth while to run some risk or to make some sacrifice to obtain it, even in trifling matters. I however have nothing to fear from Mr. Dallas's enmity, even should my staying away excite his attention, which I doubt.

January 15, 1837 At 9 went to Harrison's. Mrs. Trudeau, Read, Sally Waln, Sally Hare etc etc there. Passed a pleasant evening. This is one of the few houses left in this city, where one does not meet these vulgar, nouveau riche people, who are now crowding into society, & are seen at all the parties. The good, respectable, old-family society for which Philadelphia was once so celebrated is fast disappearing, & persons of low origin & vulgar habits, manners & feelings are introduced, because they are rich, who a few years ago were never heard of. If they were agreeable, cultivated, intelligent or beautiful there would be some compensation for the innovation, but they are all commonplace & uninteresting, many of them vulgar, stupid and ugly.

January 19, 1837 Today got a letter from Peter Engle. He says that if I had sent him the money, as I intended last fall, he could [have] purchased land for me at \$1.25, which is now worth \$10. per acre. So that according to my usual luck, I have missed the chance of making 5 or \$6000. He will be here in a week or two, & then I shall try to put a sum into his hands to take back with him. In the afternoon went to see Wm Gerhard who is sick with a severe influenza. He lives in rooms, having a chamber & office & eating out at a

⁵⁵ Van Buren appointed Dallas Minister to Russia in 1837, where he served for two years until he was recalled at his own request.

boarding house. He does not seem very comfortable, & his apartments show the want of a woman's neatness & attention. Blessed my happy lot, which gives me a house⁵⁶ and servants of my own, and a good & kind aunt (since I have not a wife) to attend to my comforts, & keep everything tidy & in order. Rode Henry's mare for a few squares. She has been at pasture since last September and looks very rough and thin but is a beautiful creature.

January 22, 1837 Sunday. Deep snow & for the first time this winter the merry sleigh bells are heard in the streets. At 9 went to Harrison's. Very few there. Talked principally to Miss Hamilton.⁵⁷ She was telling me of her unlucky sales of The Woodlands, & other property near the city. She is now very rich, but had she not sold so soon, she would have been worth four or five times as much. Home at 11 oclk.

January 30, 1837 Damp, misty mucky weather. Snow melting fast. Streets in a shocking condition. At 10 oclk. Henry & I went to Mr. Smith's funeral⁵⁸ in Aunt Smith's carriage. It was very private as all funerals should be. No women present and no person there except his most intimate friends & nearest relations, no one who did not regret his loss. How much better & more impressive this, than to see a grave & sorrowing friends surrounded by a crowd of spectators who feel no grief, & thinking and talking about the common affairs of the day. After dinner wrote a short notice of Mr. S's death for the paper. I thought that I would do it as well, perhaps better than anyone who was likely to attempt it, & that my intimacy with the family made it proper that I should offer. Took it up in the evng to George. He expressed himself much pleased with what I had done, & said that he had intended to ask me to do it. I have said nothing in it that I did not really think.

February 2, 1837 Last evng the wind changed to the north-west and today the weather is clear and cold. This morning was agreeably surprised by Engle's coming in. He travelled from Dubuque by land, & has had a most severe & fatiguing journey of 24 days over

⁵⁶ S. G. Fisher lived at 57 South Seventh Street from 1833 until his marriage in 1851.

⁵⁷ Mary Hamilton (1771-1849) never married and was the last Hamilton to occupy The Woodlands.

⁵⁸ John J. Smith, father of S. G. Fisher's friend George, died on Jan. 28, after an illness of some months.

the worst possible roads, & with the worst possible accommodations. He says the land he wished to buy for me has since sold for \$12,000! What a bitter thing. He says he thinks he can make 100 pr ct: a year for me, & that he will take the money and give me 6 pr ct, so that my income need not be diminished. He is looking very well & has been very successful. He went this morning to see his family, near Chester & will return on Monday. Went in the eveng to Dr. Hare's⁵⁹ by Sally's invitation. Mrs. Church & one or two others there. Everyone is now talking about an amateur concert & a fair which our ladies are getting up to aid the institution for instructing the blind; thus making the gratification of vanity & love of excitement subservient to the cause of charity. Mrs. Read, Mrs. Blight, Miss Wharton, etc are to sing, Mrs. Willing to play on the harp and Miss Sergeant, etc on the piano. Mrs. Edwd Coleman, etc etc are the lady patronesses of the fair, & are to sell the articles. I can't say I like the project.⁶⁰ Many persons not in our society will take the opportunity to speak to these ladies & make their remarks upon them. There is something indelicate in the thing I think & I should be sorry to see a woman in whom I felt any interest participate in it. Mrs. Read is never satisfied unless she is doing something of this kind to make her conspicuous. She must always have something or somebody to patronize. The blind certainly are more worthy & respectable objects for her enthusiasm than any of her former protégés—Willis—The Pole—or Madame Shakon.

February 4, 1837 [Last night] went to Mrs. Hartman Kuhn's ball. Decidedly the most splendid of the season. Their establishment is very handsome and complete, and all the arrangements were admirable, and had a certain air of being done without effort, as if the thing was habitual. The rooms are very large, so that it was not at all crowded—the furniture is very magnifque, & the supper-room, upstairs the handsomest I have seen. It was not a gay party, on the contrary I thought rather stiff, several persons who usually add much to the animation of the eveng being absent, and the people, as I believe being employed in looking at the rooms, furniture, etc, instead of talking and amusing themselves. At 2, went with Fisher

⁵⁹ Robert Hare (1781–1858) was an eminent American scientist, inventor, and author. He was Professor of Chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania from 1818 to 1847. *DAB*.

⁶⁰ The fair for the blind was held at Masonic Hall on Apr. 5, 6, and 7, 1837.

out to Mr. C. J. Ingersoll's⁶¹ to dinner, Mrs. Sally Ingersoll and Miss Mary Ingersoll there, had a very pleasant day. Mr. Ingersoll's conversational powers, & his gentleman-like manners make him exceedingly agreeable, & Miss Elizabeth⁶² is charming, in appearance, manner & character. What a pity it is that the father both as a politician, & a man should have behaved in such a manner as to forfeit all title to respect & incur the contempt of the community,⁶³ when his talents properly exerted would have gained him so eminent a position. Home at 7 o'clk.

February 6, 1837 Still delightful weather. Went down town. Was glad to find George Smith again at his office. Peter Engle dined with us. We invited him to dine with us whenever he has no other engagement every day whilst he is in town. He speaks with great confidence of making very profitable investments for us in the West. Describes his life there as very unpleasant. The people are about half civilized, and savage in their manners. There are no distinctions of rank, he is obliged to eat with mechanics and people of the lowest order. Every one goes armed, a common thing in the West and South, and a most barbarous custom, showing a detestable state of society. Every one is absorbed in the pursuit of money, not by steady industry but by speculation, which produces a gambling spirit, and is subversive of good morals.

February 7, 1837 Delightful weather. Thos R. Fisher⁶⁴ sent me a case, which is a bore as I shall have to attend to it.

February 9, 1837 In the morning reading some law, relating to Tom Fisher's case. It is indeed quite a farce for me to attempt to practice. I have given up reading law or thinking of it. I never go to

⁶¹ Charles Jared Ingersoll was an outstanding lawyer, author, and man in politics. A gifted orator, Ingersoll held both state and national political offices. *DAB*.

⁶² Elizabeth Ingersoll, daughter of C. J. Ingersoll, married S. G. Fisher in 1851.

⁶³ Ingersoll incurred the contempt of Philadelphia society when he repudiated his Federalist politics to become a Jackson supporter. Formerly active in the affairs of the Bank of the United States, Ingersoll had favored the renewal of the Bank charter, but he reversed his position and his political allegiance when the Bank entered politics. Later in 1837, when serving as chairman of a special committee on currency and corporation as part of the work on the revision of the Pennsylvania Constitution, Ingersoll increased his unpopularity in Philadelphia by proposing to limit the powers of corporations and by opposing the contract doctrine of charter as defined in the Dartmouth College case of 1819. His minority report from this committee was even denied publication. *DAB*.

⁶⁴ Thomas Rodman Fisher (1803-1861) of Wakefield, a first cousin to S. G. Fisher.

court. I know nothing of the routine of business, & dislike the profession, & everything connected with it. An occasional case however in which I could make a speech, I should not object to. There would be some excitement in it, & if I managed well, some triumph in showing all the eager youngsters, who spend their hours in court to catch a client, & who have no thought, no feeling, no sense for anything save the faintest gleam of coming preferment, that it is not altogether from want of ability that I am without that which they consider at once the crown of existence and the test of merit—practice—but that if I would, I could. Most deeply do I thank my stars, which made [me] independent, tho not rich. I know of nothing more narrowing to the mind, more debasing to the soul than this same struggle for business at the bar to which so many of our young men are obliged to devote themselves; and nothing has ever disgusted me so much with human nature as to witness the moral qualities which it produces or develops & cherishes. Meanness of feeling, illiberality of opinion, narrowness & littleness of mind, callousness to the good or great or beautiful, absence of enthusiasm, sordidness, & cringing, crawling sycophancy to older members of the bar or to business men who have practice to give, are the traits which I have seen appear and grow with morbid rapidity in persons from whom I would have expected better things. I would take up government land in the west, or cultivate a farm, even a small one, rather than gain my bread by such sacrifices of the best & most elevated feelings of our nature. However all this is not necessary, & is I believe injurious in the end. The really noble nature, tho kept in obscurity for a time by inability to practice the arts which produce notoriety, is in the end recognized and appreciated. While the grass grows, however, the steed may starve. As for me I live on, without an object, I scarcely know how, but day passes after day with amazing rapidity, marked not by events but by feelings, & the scenes & persons which surround me seem like the images of a dream. I cannot describe the strange feeling of unreality which I experience in my contemplation of existence, produced I suppose by my habits of reverie, & by the little personal interest that I feel in anything. This dangerous love of reverie encreases upon me; I like to retire to the persons, scenes and passions of my ideal world, as the actual world around me becomes more dreary, prosaic & barren. Mine is the fatal gift of imagination. I am

its complete slave, & all my life have been dreaming, which leads to nothing, instead of acting, by which I might frequently have accomplished much.

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This shows the difference between the best Philad: & N. York society. The first unpretending, elegant, cordial & friendly containing many persons not rich, but few whose families have not held the same station for several generations, which circumstance has produced an air of refinement, dignity & simplicity of manner, wanting in N. York and also a great degree of intimacy among the different families who compose our society, as their fathers & grandfathers knew each other & associated together in former years, & they themselves have probably been playmates & gone to the same school. Wealth is not the only passport, nor want of it a reason for exclusion. This probably will not last very long, but it will for some years to come give a tone to Philad: society, which no other cause could produce. In N. York, there is all the vulgarity, meanness, & ostentatious parade of parvenuism. Wealth is the only thing which admits, & it will admit a shoe-black, poverty the only thing which excludes & it would exclude grace, wit & worth with the blood of the Howards. In this country & age of speculation & enterprise, large fortunes are frequently made in a very short time, & this has been & is particularly the case in N. York, and as money there is the only test, the society is composed of people from every rank in life, even the lowest. There are but few families of long standing, & they cannot vie with the nouveau riches, who have immense incomes which they spend very lavishly. The love of money there is the absorbing passion; every other feeling is made to yield to it; the immense fortunes made in the West by speculation have produced a wild gambling spirit, which has seized upon the whole population & amounts to monomania. When I was in the western part of N. York last summer I heard of nothing but Michigan lands & town lots. The moral effects of all this are very deplorable. It produces sordidness, fraud, distaste for the sober pursuits of industry, & callousness to all the nobler & better feelings of our nature. In Penna & Philad: this spirit has not yet become predominant, in some of our agricultural counties we have an excellent, intelligent, moral population, & in the city, a man must have some other claims than those which money gives to be

admitted into society. We are however degenerating, the society here is no longer so select & refined by any means as it used to be, & I suppose before many years it will be as vulgar & gaudy & low-bred as that of N. York.

February 14, 1837 Today news came that a mob, in consequence of the high price of provisions had broken open some flour ware-houses in N. York, & were helping themselves. Democracy is indeed triumphing. What a farce to call this a government of laws! Every day some outrage is committed by the populace, & life and property rendered insecure. The worst of it is that it will probably get worse before it is better. A wild, radical, agrarian spirit is abroad, which is constantly fanned and excited by incendiary presses, & designing demagogues for their own purposes.

February 15, 1837 By the way Tom told us to-day what I did not know before, that my great-grandfather Joshua Fisher,⁶⁵ who was one of the most eminent merchants in the country of his day, was one of the first persons who made a move in Penna to effect the abolition of slavery in this state. The Quakers about that time made it a rule of discipline that none of their society should hold slaves, & soon after the legislature passed a law, prospectively prohibiting it. He was a large holder himself, & not only manumitted all that he possessed at the time, but, having sold his field hands before he became convinced of the impropriety of the institution, he actually as a point of duty & conscience, bought all those whom he had so sold with their children, & set them free, a noble act certainly. He also established the first line of packet ships, between this port & London. My mother also manumitted all the slaves she inherited from her father, except of course those who were old & whom she was bound to support. We have one of the stock left, Old Becky, who is supposed to be more than 100 years of age, & whom we keep at Middle-Neck. This subject of slavery is becoming a very important & exciting one, pregnant I fear with many future disasters. The current of public opinion in the North is setting fast & strongly against it. Petitions are pouring into Congress, the Southern men are indignant, passions are aroused & it seems scarcely possible for any prudence and sagacity to avert the coming storm. The abolition

⁶⁵ Joshua Fisher (1707-1783), a notable merchant and Quaker, moved to Philadelphia from Delaware in 1746. He is best remembered for his famous chart of Delaware Bay in 1756.

societies are numerous, powerful, enthusiastic & determined, & as the wealth & population of the North are vastly superior to those of the South, they must in the end prevail or sever the Union.

February 20, 1837 Monday. Altho I have nothing to do, I positively cannot find time to write in this diary. I believe time flies faster for an idle man than for the busy. Day speeds on after day, & at night when I go to bed I ask myself, what have I done, what have I enjoyed, always with the same reply—nothing. I rise about half past 8, breakfast at half past 9. I sit in my study and read, or write till 12 or 1. I must then walk or ride, or visit, till 3. Then dinner and coffee & cigars and talk with Henry as it is almost the only time I see him, till 5. Then a walk or a call on some of my friends till 7, then tea & the newspaper & books till 9 if I go out to a party, if not, books till 12. So pass my days, not certainly without some profit, for I read a good deal, but without action, without external interest or palpable achievement.

February 26, 1837 Got home yesterday, thru the mud at a walk as before.⁶⁶ The stage left Chester at 11 o'clk & got to town, 15 miles, at 5. All that way we came literally in a slow walk. The river is pretty clear of ice & tomorrow the boats commence running. In another year the rail-road between Philad. and Wilmington will be completed & then the trip can be made in an hour & a half. Wilmington is improving very much. A great many new houses are going up, and as it will be the termination of several rail-roads, I have no doubt the place will increase. They have discovered several marl-pits in the neighborhood of Middletown and the head of the Sassafrass. The people seem getting rapidly into the spirit of improvement, they are out of debt, the price of grain is high and the land must rise in value. Was very glad to get home, where I found all well, and the town as dull as possible. No parties, no gayety or prospect of any. . . . Fisher has got Mr. Harrison's portrait home. It is a capital one in every respect. In features, expression, attitude & coloring it is as like him as possible. Inman certainly is a better portrait painter than Sully, who painted Henry's and mine which are neither of them good, tho Hen's is like him.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ After a visit to Mount Harmon.

⁶⁷ Henry Inman's portrait of George Harrison is the property of Mrs. William Howard Hart of Ambler, Pa., and the Thomas Sully portraits of Henry and S. G. Fisher belong to Mrs. James B. Drinker of Jenkintown, Pa.

February 28, 1837 Saml R. Fisher was a very queer old man, & died three years ago at the age of 89.⁶⁸ He left a large fortune & Tom is worth about \$150,000 yet is fool enough to engage in business.⁶⁹ His father & grandfather, my great grandfather, were eminent merchants, & their houses existed in good repute & high standing at home & abroad for 100 years, from 1729 to 1829. I am somewhat proud of my family, as on both sides my ancestors for 5 or 6 generations have held the stations of gentlemen & men of property & education, which is something in this country of parvenues. Some of them have been distinguished, as Jas: Logan, my grt: grt: grandfather, the friend and secretary of William Penn, a man of learning & an author; Mary Dyre,⁷⁰ the celebrated Quaker martyr, and Joshua George⁷¹ my grt: grt: grandfather, the King's attorney general in Maryland.

March 3, 1837 Am determined to make myself a good historical scholar; I should then like to go to Europe & visit the scenes of the great events which are recorded, see the monuments of other times, study the characters of different nations, have my taste elevated & corrected by works of art, & my mind & memory stored with new ideas & associations; two or three years could be passed in this way with profit & delight & then I should like to return & lead a quiet literary life in the country. This is my pet plan, but it is easy to dream.

March 4, 1837 Today Mr. Van Buren became Prest: of the U. States, and Genl Jackson closed an administration, distinguished by ignorance, folly, passion and corruption; injurious to the best interests of the country, & disgraceful to the people who chose & sustained in so elevated a station a person eminently unfitted by nature and education to perform its duties. He is a man of most arbitrary temper, of furious & ungovernable passion, of inflexible obstinacy and of mean and ordinary intellect. He is entirely without the knowledge which a statesman should possess, which his early life,

⁶⁸ Samuel R. Fisher (1745-1834), like his father Joshua, was also a prosperous merchant and a prominent member of the Society of Friends. During the Revolution he was exiled to Virginia and later jailed because of his loyalist sympathies.

⁶⁹ Thomas Fisher (1801-1856) was not successful in business. His interests were literary and scientific.

⁷⁰ Mary Dyer was hanged at Boston on June 1, 1660.

⁷¹ S. G. Fisher's mother was Ann Eliza George (d. 1821), the daughter of Sidney George of Maryland. A granddaughter of Mary Dyer married a George.

passed as it was in the border warfare with the Indians in the Southwest, when the Southwest was even more barbarous than it now is, rendered it impossible for him to acquire—even had his mind been capable of receiving it. He was utterly unable to conceive a correct notion of the true dignity, proper motives, and real objects of the office which he held, but used power merely to gratify his personal feelings and love of arbitrary sway. He persecuted his enemies with the most deadly hate, and rewarded his flatterers without regard to the public good. Supported in all things by the blind & stupid enthusiasm of the populace and the reckless zeal of party spirit, he disregarded the constitution, defied the authority of the co-ordinate branches of government, and hesitated not to use any means, however violent or however base, to make his will the supreme law. He ruled as chief of the party, and not as the first magistrate of the country; under him the habit of using the patronage of the government for the purpose of rewarding & stimulating political partizans, which was formerly to a limited extent, the concealed practice, became the avowed principle of the administration, employed throughout its ramifications from the highest to the pettiest office; and party discipline organized the immense mercenary band into one vast & consolidated system of fraud & corruption. Men were chosen for their vileness to fill important posts, and the prominent “leaders” of the party, throughout the country, were almost universally persons of desperate fortunes & infamous characters, whose necessities & whose baseness made them the pliant tools of power. To the influence of patronage was added the influence of money; the Bank of the U.S. was broken because it would not bend to executive dictation, & the revenues of the country amounting to 40 or 50 millions, were wielded to make friends and frighten enemies. The system of deposit banks was invented, & a more ingenious machinery of corruption was never devised. The President was surrounded by a crew of congenial friends and associates, men of low origin, vulgar education & infamous character who were his confidants and advisers, whose influence was greater than that of the ostensible & legal cabinet, and who proposed and carried thro the most important measures of State. These men have grown rich by frauds of every kind, and have made the house of the chief magistrate the resort of black-legs, adventurers, & blackguards of every description. Such is the chief of the democracy,

adored by the common people, because his qualities, ferocity, courage, obstinacy, ignorance & vulgarity are congenial with their own, & such only as they admire & appreciate. His career is a sufficient refutation of the absurd idea, contradicted by all past experience, that the people are competent to self-government, the folly of which will be more fully shown by the future fate of this country, as the effects of the maxims, principles and measures of this administration are in successive years more completely developed. Our present evils & distresses are but the first fruits of that pernicious tree planted by Thos: Jefferson & nurtured & cherished by Genl Jackson, which has struck its roots broadly and deeply into our soil, & whose rank & spreading growth is now beginning to cast its poisonous and withering shade so widely over the land. Van Buren is a worthy successor to such a chief. He is quite as corrupt, and more cunning; his motives are as base, his designs as bad, & he has more ability; and as he has the power to govern his passions & conceal his feelings & opinions, he is more dangerous. He is a sly, sneaking, adroit and practised intriguer, and has risen from being the son of a grog-shop keeper at Kinderhook, and subsequently a pettifogging attorney in the same place, by management & trickery alone, without displaying a single shining or great quality or performing a single public service of importance, to be the President of a great nation. This has been effected by the influence of Jackson's popularity & by party organization. The only hope is that tho he is as bad he is not so bold as his predecessor, & that not being so enthusiastically supported by the mob, he may be led from cautious & politic motives to adopt measures to conciliate the conservative classes.

March 6, 1837 Clear, mild day. In the morning wrote letters, went to Bank, etc. Th: R. Fisher came in at 3, to ask professional advice about some business connected with the Lindleys. Stayed to dinner & bored me horribly. He is a good natured, industrious fellow, but very coarse & uncouth. Think I shall charge the boring I got in the fee, particularly as he invited himself to renew it on Thursday, when he is to come to get my opinion. I wish no one would give me any business, I hate everything connected with law & only wish enough practice to keep me off juries. After dinner read Jackson's farewell address to the people, in which he volunteers to give them a great deal of advice, & attempts to explain what he calls the prin-

ciples of his administration. It is not known by whom it was written. Some of the arguments are just, & with the exception of some absurdities about the Bk: of U.S. & paper currency, it is a creditable production. Van Buren's inaugural address is also published. It is full of congratulation on the abounding prosperity of the country & the virtue, intelligence, energy & happiness of the people; he contends that we have at length proved to the world that the people are competent to govern themselves, that all the predictions of the enemies & many of the friends of our institutions have been falsified, because our Union has remained unbroken, and our government entire for the space of 50 years; that having existed as a free, united and happy people for so very long a period, we have good reason to expect that we shall remain so to the end of time.

March 9, 1837 Still warm and raining. Tom Fisher here, advised him what to do. Wadsworth here for a few minutes. Engle came. Went to Cary's⁷² with him about the books for the Wisconsin Library.⁷³ After dinner he came again, & George Smith also. He gave a description of his life in the West, which is rough enough, but will hereafter be more comfortable as he has built a house & will take furniture from Pittsburgh with him. The prospects of that country are immense. There will soon be a water & rail-road communication all the way to the Mississippi, & in a few years ships will sail from Milwaukee to England! In another half century settlements, canals & rail-roads will be pushed to the Pacific. Could we remain united for another century, imagination can scarcely conceive the prosperity, the happiness which this nation would attain in that time.

March 12, 1837 Sunday. Weather still mild and clear. Yesterday Engle dined here. Told us that he had seen the person who purchased the lot in Wisconsin which he had entered for me, who told him that he had since been offered \$60,000 for it! This is my usual luck, always to be *very near* getting the thing I want. He & Henry both gave me a lecture after dinner, about the idle, purposeless life I am leading, shameful waste of talents given for better uses, and poor prospects for the future if I still continue to do nothing to

⁷² Edward L. Carey and Abraham Hart, booksellers, 126 Chestnut Street. Edward (1805-1845) was the son of Mathew Carey.

⁷³ The act organizing the Territory of Wisconsin, signed by President Jackson on Apr. 20, 1836, contained a clause appropriating five thousand dollars for "the purchase of a library for the accommodation of the Assembly and of the Supreme Court."

obtain fame or fortune. It is very true. I have wasted the best part of my life, & thrown away powers & opportunities enjoyed by few. There are reasons however which partly excuse me, which they do not know of. After all it is very much an affair of temperament.

March 16, 1837 The weather has been delightful for the last four days, with the exception of Monday when it rained. I have been employed as usual in reading, walking & doing nothing. On Monday night was at Mrs. Moncure Robinson's⁷⁴ ball. He is the great engineer, & is now in Europe. She is a Virginian, and is a small, thin, languid looking woman, who would be rather pretty were it not for a large and very ugly mouth. The house was excessively crowded and hot. All the Virginians in town were there as a matter of course, and a good many other strangers, among them Mr. and Mrs. Danl Webster. I danced with Miss Kuhn, & talked to her & her party nearly all eveng. On Tuesday went to Mrs. Read's soiree. Had some music & some agreeable people. A very handsome dressing gown was raffled for, & Mr. Emery was the lucky man. I was fool enough to take four tickets.

March 21, 1837 Cloudy, took a ride out the Ridge Road as far as Laurel Hill. They will make a pretty place of it, 19 persons have already been buried there. Was caught in the rain. The grass begins to look a little green, and the first approaches of spring to be felt. Anticipate much pleasure, in riding, walking, and watching the bursting of the buds, the coming of leaves, & the gradual deepening of the verdure as the year advances. Galloped home in a fast rain, which continued all day. Read all the afternoon and eveng. Skimmed thro Cooper's France,⁷⁵ which is flat & dull. Full of his prejudices, self-conceit, & bad feeling. No one ever less deserved & yet obtained a great reputation than Cooper. Reputation however is not fame, & he is now I think pretty well understood.

March 26, 1837 Sunday. The last week having been Passion Week, there were no parties. Two or three popular preachers are exerting considerable influence among our ladies I think, to no good result however in my opinion. The weather since Wednesday has been delightful, & I have walked & rode a good deal. On Wednesday

⁷⁴ Mrs. Moncure Robinson was the former Charlotte Randolph Taylor. Robinson (1802-1891) was at this time engaged in the construction of the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad and was in England securing additional capital for its extension to Pottsville. *DAB*.

⁷⁵ James Fenimore Cooper's *Gleanings in Europe* (1837) was devoted to France.

evng went to a concert given by 8 musicians from Prague.⁷⁶ They played admirably, some well-selected pieces. I enjoyed it very much, & shall go to all their concerts. Found the Kuhns there and joined their party. Friday evng spent at Mrs. Ch: Kuhn's. Last evng went to Doctor Wood's⁷⁷ Wister, took Engle who dined with me. The universal topic of conversation is the present distress, & melancholy prospects of the commercial community. Some of the largest houses have failed for enormous amounts, as the Hermans of N. Orleans, 10 millions, the Josephs of N. York, 6 millions,⁷⁸ the Philips, and Jackson Riddle & Co:⁷⁹ of this city, besides several others of less note. Greater disasters are expected daily, and many fear a universal crash in the moneyed affairs of Europe & this country, for matters are even worse in England than they are here. So complicated are the relations of trade, and so numerous are the causes constantly at work to produce existing phenomena, that it seems almost impossible to account satisfactorily for any unusual state of things, particularly in this country, where the interests and the operations of business are so extensive & diversified, and are scattered over so vast a space. The present distress is generally ascribed to over-trading of every kind, and to the immense & reckless speculations in the public lands, in stocks, & in property of every description. There must always be a tendency to this in our country, where capital is not yet abundant, & where the scope to enterprise is boundless, but the excess to which it has been carried is ascribed by many, and particularly by Condé Raguet⁸⁰ (in an article in the *National Gazette* which I have preserved) to the ignorant meddling by the Government with the cur-

⁷⁶ The musicians had previously been playing in New York. Their performance at Musical Fund Hall, attended by S. G. Fisher, was warmly applauded in the press.

⁷⁷ George Bacon Wood (1797-1879) was not only a leader of the medical profession in Philadelphia, but also in the nation. For twenty years he served as president of the American Philosophical Society. Wood was a man of great personal charm and force and had an aristocratic disposition. *DAB*.

⁷⁸ The sums mentioned here are probably exaggerated. The fall of the Hermans in New Orleans closed the doors of their New York correspondents, J. L. & S. Josephs, on Mar. 17, 1837. The Josephs suspended payments "for rising two millions of dollars." *United States Gazette*, Mar. 18, 1837.

⁷⁹ R. and J. Phillips, merchants, 52 South Front Street; Jackson Riddle & Company, iron merchants, 20 South Front Street.

⁸⁰ Condé Raguet (1784-1842), editor and economist, was devoted to the cause of constitutional liberty and was a prolific writer on currency and the tariff. From July, 1837, to December, 1838, he was concerned in the publication of the *Financial Register of the United States*. *DAB*.

rency, & to the removal of the public deposits from the Bank of the U. States. His argument is too long to make an abstract of it here, but I think he shows very clearly the manner, in which the establishment of deposit Banks, among which the revenue was distributed, has taken money from the Atlantic cities where it was wanted for the *ordinary* purposes of commerce, to the West where it was not wanted; how that gave in the West extraordinary facilities to credit, how speculation was thereby stimulated & encouraged, how the revenue was thereby increased by the increased sale of public lands bought with money borrowed from the Government; how this produced fictitious prices of property which tempted more capital from the East, until the Banks and individuals became so extended, so loaded with debt, that the least derangement might involve them in ruin. Upon the top of all this comes the law for distributing the surplus revenue among the states. The Banks have not the revenue, it has been all loaned out; they must call it in from their debtors, they must stop discounting, hence general embarrassment, universal pressure for money, the bankruptcy of some, the danger & alarm of all. I do not see that Henry or myself can be injured, unless the Southwestern Banks should break which is not likely, as they are said by informed persons to be the strongest in the country. He has \$10,000 and I \$2,000 in the Grand Gulf Bk: I cannot help thinking that the alarm is greater than the actual danger justifies. The Capitalist is the most easily frightened of beings. The country is undoubtedly highly prosperous, a few speculators & imprudent merchants may fail, money may for a time be "tighter" than ever, but the thunder-storm will soon be over & the atmosphere will be clearer than before. Engle thinks the effect of all this on the West will be transient. Prices will be knocked down for a time. Two thirds of the land in the hands of the speculators has been bought with capital borrowed at a high rate of interest, & bought with the expectation of being able to make a speedy sale; these men must now most probably sell at a sacrifice, but the causes of prosperity still remain there active as ever, & if the West goes back at all, it will only be "*reculer pour mieux sauter.*" Henry dined yesterday at Mr. Jno: A. Brown's⁸¹—a wedding party—

⁸¹ John A. Brown (1788-1872), a successful merchant banker who established a branch of his family's Baltimore house (Alexander Brown & Sons) in Philadelphia in 1818, retired when the panic of 1837 impaired his health. He devoted the rest of his life to philanthropies and church work. *DAB*.

as his son is just married. Mr. Brown has lost about \$300,000 by these late failures. That however is a small matter to him. I am glad to find that Henry's prudence, sagacity, activity & gentleman-like manner, are beginning to attract the attention of certain persons here whose notice is worth having.

March 31, 1837 Cold, east wind & rain. Yesterday it was cloudy & disagreeable. Last night went to the Citizens ball in the aid of the Firemen's fund. It was at the Arch St. Theatre. The pit was floored over level with the stage, and several thousand people were present. It was certainly an interesting sight and I was much pleased with the respectable appearance, & proper quiet behavior of the multitude. There were certainly many ridiculous & awkward figures, but I question very much whether any other country could show, from the same classes of society so many well dressed, & well behaved people. There were a good many fashionable ladies there, the Kuhns, Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Wadsworth, Mrs. Trudeau, etc etc. These public balls have a good effect in bringing the different classes together occasionally, & tend to produce a more kindly feeling on both sides. The higher order are impressed with respect by witnessing the multitudes of decent, good-looking people, among those whom they are apt to regard with contempt, & the lower are gratified by being in the same room with persons whom they consider above them, by having an opportunity of seeing and observing their appearance and manner, & by feeling, that they do not disdain to mingle with them and partake of the same amusements with themselves. The rooms were not sufficiently lighted, & the decorations by no means handsome.

April 1, 1837 Raw and gusty day. Read, walked, met the Kuhns & went with them to see the Diorama, a picture of the departure of the Israelites. It is extremely well worth seeing. The sky, the dawn of day, the massy and grand piles of Egyptian architecture, and the countless multitude of the departing nation are admirably designed and executed. In the afternoon George Smith sat with me for an hour or two. Says he thinks he will go down with me to Mt. Harmon this month. In the evening went to Dr. Hare's Wister party. Had some talk with Condé Raguet, the author of some articles in the National Gazette signed "Examiner" on the subject of the present commercial distresses. He says he thinks things must

continue in their present state or worse for a year to come. That everything is inflated, prices unnaturally high & almost every business man encumbered with engagements he cannot meet. In the meantime the failures are going on. Comly⁸² went yesterday, one of the most extensive & thought to be one of the firmest houses in the city. Several more in N. York and N. Orleans have also failed.

April 12, 1837 No one could lead a more useless and profitless life than I do, and yet when I look round me, and see what others are doing, I know not with whom I would be willing to exchange. The fact is, that there is no career of activity in this country, that is satisfactory to a mind in any degree elevated above the common level. The professions have become mere money making pursuits, business of all kinds is degrading, & public life almost disreputable, besides that it offers no adequate reward, and that its rewards such as they are, are not to be obtained by the honorable and independent exercise of ability. The only thing then for a man to do, who is not obliged by necessity to work is, to marry, go into the country, and cultivate his farm and his mind at the same time.

April 16, 1837 Sunday. Last eveng Engle spent with me. He started this morning for Dubuque. His prospects of success are very good, & he goes full of confidence & good spirits. I hope he may not be disappointed, for he is one of the best fellows in the world. He is to write me when he gets out there, giving information as to the state of the country & the prospects of profitable investments, which I fear are very much injured by the present distress and confusion in the money affairs of the country, which seem daily to increase, & which are said to be greater than they ever were before.

April 20, 1837 Weather mild still, tho yesterday & today have been cloudy. Have read, rode, walked etc. as usual. Last night went to a pleasant party at Mrs. Wadsworth's, and tonight at Norris's. Every one talks of the gloomy & distressed state of affairs. The question every morning is, who have failed? And yet bad as the times are, much more serious disasters are apprehended. Tomorrow shall go down to Mount Harmon, George Smith is to accompany me.

April 28, 1837 Returned yesterday from Mt. Harmon after a week very pleasantly spent, altho the weather was not of the best. On Sunday we had a snow storm, which lasted nearly all day & gave

⁸² Samuel Comly, commission merchant, 13 North Water Street.

to everything the appearance of winter. The snow falling on the green fields produced a very singular effect. We took a great deal of exercise, being out of doors nearly all day, and have returned brown with exposure & in high health, George having got rid of his dyspepsia & I of my bad spirits. The farm is improving very rapidly. Rickards⁸³ has done a great deal of work in clearing pieces of land that were overgrown with thickets, & there is every prospect of excellent crops for this year. The lime & plaster are producing their effects. The wheat is by far the best in the neighborhood, & the oats is well up looking about as well as most of the wheat in that region.

Find on getting home, that the distress among business men is increasing and that the greatest alarm and excitement pervades the community. All the merchants in N. Orleans except 4 have failed, nearly all are expected to fail in N. York, many of the best houses have gone here, several of the public works have stopped, the working classes are thrown out of employment, and universal bankruptcy and confusion, so long predicted as the certain consequence of the insane measures of the administration seem impending over the country. Speculation and over-trading have been carried on so wildly, & to such an enormous extent, that now the *collapse*, the reaction is tremendous. Never before, in the history of our country have ruin & embarrassment been so extensive & so deeply felt. The people are now feeling the effects, naturally produced, by placing power in the hands of ignorant & corrupt men. Raguet has shown very clearly in the National Gazette, that the present difficulties are the consequences of Genl Jackson's violent & unconstitutional acts, and I believe many of those who were his warmest adherents are now convinced of it. In the meantime we hear nothing of Van Buren. He is silent & non committal still, but will find with all his adroitness that he has a difficult & dangerous game to play. Could not help contrasting the quiet & calmness of the country, with the harassing excitement & alarm in town. The farmer is but little affected by fluctuations & disasters of commerce & finance. The price of grain may fall, he may have a bad season, but his land always remains to him, & in the worst possible times will afford a certain & comfortable support. It is the only independent, & I think in this country the only gentlemanly pursuit. Congratulated myself on having a good farm,

⁸³ Rickards was S. G. Fisher's tenant farmer at Mount Harmon.

for if I should lose everything else, I could go there & live well. Find that Henry will probably lose \$1 or \$2000 by the failure of some people here. He has been very cautious & prudent in his operations, but in such times as these dangers cannot be foreseen, the greatest prudence is sometimes of little avail. I hope however he may come off clear, & I think if the South Western Banks stand the storm that he will do so. Property of all kinds must fall greatly in value, and some persons who have been ranked as millionaires must come down in their estimates. The time was when a man worth \$100,000 was thought rich, lately, such has been the extravagant value put upon property that no one was thought well off who had not 2 or 300,000, and to be called wealthy a man must be worth half a million. The old estimates will come back again I think, and the expense, luxury and parade of some of these parvenues give place to the solid & substantial respectability, and elegance without pretension of the old time.

May 6, 1837 Warm as June. Walked & read and did nothing as usual. Am very tired of this vile life I am leading. At home alone all the evng. The alarm among the business men greater, if possible, than before. The laboring classes have been thrown out of employment by the almost universal cessation of all kinds of business, there are abundance of demagogues and incendiary presses to persuade them that their distress is all produced by Banks, monopolies, aristocrats, capitalists, etc, & to inflame their passions against the rich, so that I should not be surprised at some outbreaks of mob violence, particularly in N. York.

May 7, 1837 Went to Harrison's. Met Dr. Chapman there. He said, that a few days ago he dined with Van Buren & some of his cabinet, that the terrible state of money affairs was discussed, & that they seemed in a good deal of perplexity and alarm admitting to the fullest extent the enormity of the evils under which the country is groaning, but not knowing what to do to relieve them.

May 11, 1837 Yesterday the Banks in N. York, & today those of Philad: stopped specie payments. Also have those of Baltimore, Charleston & N. Orleans, & it is probable that the suspension will be general throughout the country. The effect so far has been that real estate & stocks have gone up, & specie is at a premium of 10 per ct: There does not appear to be much excitement, but every one seems in good spirits & good humor. The banks are no doubt perfectly

solvent, they receive each other's notes on deposit & in payment of debts, & the notes perform the ordinary exchanges of business. The only annoyance is, the difficulty of getting small sums in silver. The weather yesterday & today has been perfect. Yesterday, read, walked, listened to the news & spent the evening at home. Today went down town to hear what people had to say. There were some crowds about the Bank of U.S. & the Girard Bank, & some attempts were made without success to get up an excitement. In anticipation of some disturbance the police were in readiness, and also some of the military, but everything seems quiet. It is amusing to listen to the various opinions expressed on this all-absorbing topic. Every man has his own theory, & his own prophecy and one hears a vast deal of nonsense, & a great many crude notions on all sides. As the distress & confusion are as great in Europe as in this country, I believe that some more general & powerful cause exists for the present phenomena than has yet been discovered. Perhaps, long peace, general prosperity, a constantly increasing demand has pushed forward commercial enterprise to excess, and a universal over-trading has produced universal embarrassment. I do not think we can be materially injured, & it will be interesting to look on & watch the progress of affairs.

May 15, 1837 Very delightful weather. People still talk of nothing but "the times" and you hear the words "bank," "specie," "currency" from every group in the streets. The only practical inconvenience now felt is the difficulty of getting small change, as there are no bank notes under \$5.00. To remedy this, the city councils have issued certificates of loan, in sums from ten cts upwards. This is an evasion of the law on their part, tho perhaps under the circumstances, justifiable. Unfortunately their example has been followed by several loan companies & individuals, in direct & open violation of law & to the great injury of society. This state of things is certainly a fine commentary on the magnificent schemes and promises of Genl Jackson, who was above all things to introduce a *hard money* currency & equalize exchanges. The government itself now cannot pay specie and the probability is, that millions of the revenue already accumulated are irretrievably lost. Such are the national results of clothing ignorance and folly with power.