

The Diary of Sidney George Fisher

1860

THE final months of 1860 find our diarist, Sidney George Fisher, whose writings have been appearing serially in this *Magazine*, at the height of his powers and still in good health. His pen busily sketched in the eventful scenes of a troubled day and found time, also, to write an extended essay, a major article on the problem of secession, and an agricultural speech. Ensconced with his wife "Bet" at Forest Hill, his country home, Fisher preserved his aloofness from the madding crowd. Although he voted in the Pennsylvania gubernatorial contest, he refrained from casting his ballot in the presidential election. He wanted Lincoln to win, but not by a large majority.

September 22, 1860 Met Mr. Boker in the street. He is the author of several volumes of poetry, not without merit.¹ He tried at first to publish them here, but they failed entirely. He then got them published by Ticknor & Fields in Boston and he says several editions have been sold. He says one might as well bury a book in the ground as publish it in Philada.

September 23, 1860 Mr. J. R. Ingersoll is very enthusiastic for Bell & Everett and very active in his exertions in their behalf, making speeches at public meetings, &c.² He has just returned from a canvassing and "stumping" tour in Virginia and was much pleased with all that he saw & heard there. He says that Bell will carry the state. The support he receives in the South is a good sign. It shows the existence of moderate, conservative sentiment where it is most needed and least expected. Mr. Ingersoll looks well and is animated

¹ George Henry Boker (1823-1890), playwright, poet, and diplomat.

² Joseph R. Ingersoll, uncle of the diarist's wife, had enjoyed a notable public career. He was a warm supporter of the presidential nominees of the "Union Party," John Bell of Tennessee and Edward Everett of Massachusetts.

& in good spirits. Work does not hurt him. He shows energy & activity and as his efforts are wholly disinterested & his opinions correct, the course he takes is worthy respect and imitation. Most men of his position, age & fortune prefer their ease & dignity to active labors.

October 6, 1860 The state election comes off next Tuesday & the controversy waxes hot. Mr. J. R. Ingersoll has made himself prominent for Bell and in his speeches & articles for newspapers has committed serious blunders & indiscretions that have exposed him to severe attacks.³ The vote of Pennsylvania at the coming election will, it is said, be decisive of the election of President in November. Consequently, the politicians on both sides are active. Money is spent like water by each party. Town meetings, stump oratory, torchlight processions and all other means of excitement are rife throughout the state, in every county. The people, however, seem in good humor and no violent or dangerous feeling appears to be roused, tho the leaders & demagogues abuse each other with much bitterness. Standing aloof as a spectator, I enjoy the scene. On the whole it is satisfactory. The people are intelligent, prosperous and happy, as no other people are, they are consulting about their affairs, discussing them warmly indeed, but not in an angry, quarrelsome spirit, and notwithstanding many abuses to regret, republican institutions work well, particularly in the country. It seems to be generally expected that Lincoln will be elected. It is desirable that he should be, not merely because he is a safe man and the principles of his party are, if not entirely correct, by far the best of any other party, but because, if he be not successful, the election would be thrown into the House, probably into the Senate, in which a candidate representing a small minority of the people and that minority a Southern faction might be chosen. The wishes of the great majority of the people would be defeated, which would be a very dangerous thing. I shall therefore probably vote for Lincoln, if I vote at all.

October 9, 1860 Voted at the Rising Sun,⁴ this being election day, for Curtin, the Republican candidate for governor.⁵ The only

³ Ingersoll favored the election of a "radical" Democrat as governor of Pennsylvania and denounced the "Black Republicans." This course turned the heavy artillery of the influential *North American* against him.

⁴ The Rising Sun Tavern on the Old York Road.

⁵ Andrew G. Curtin, who was to prove victorious.

candidate on the other side is Foster, a Democrat,⁶ and of course I would vote against him. I know nothing of either.

October 11, 1860 At 12 started to go up to Andalusia to dine with Craig Biddle and the Farmers' Club.⁷ Had a pleasant drive as the country is now assuming the exquisite colors of autumn, that most delightful period of our year. It is a luxury to breathe and to gaze. Reached the house a little after 2. Found that the gentlemen were out on the farm, so I, not seeking them, walked about the grounds. The lawn slopes to the river and around the house are several acres judiciously planted with groups of trees, now grown to be of large size. There are many fine Norways & other evergreens. The place shows want of keeping, tho it is not neglected or slovenly. It would be very expensive to maintain such a place in high order and the buildings and house, inside and out, tho comfortable & neat, would be improved by renewal & repair. At 3 we dined. The company were Merrick, McMichael, King, Freass, Blight, Harrison, Dr. Jno. Biddle, Dr. Peace, Harrison, McCrea, Mr. Cannel, & Charles Biddle.⁸ The conversation was not very interesting, tho animated. I came away at 6 and got home at 8. Terry had been here and finished copying my essay on Race.⁹ Bet was waiting tea for me. Some of the company had been to the opera last night and described the scene as very magnificent. The boxes were filled with ladies in full dress and when the Prince entered his box the whole audience rose and the band struck up "God Save the Queen."¹⁰ Several anecdotes were told of his affability & ease of manner and all spoke of him with cordial good will. This is gratifying and it is because of the sympathy of race. The people seem almost to think he is their

⁶ Henry D. Foster.

⁷ The Farmers' Club consisted of twelve members and had been founded in 1847. Craig Biddle of Andalusia had recently been elected its president.

⁸ Samuel V. Merrick, Morton McMichael, Dr. Charles R. King, Philip R. Freass, George Blight, Charles W. Harrison, Dr. John Biddle, Dr. Edward Peace, Dr. James A. McCrea, and Wilmer Connell were all members of the Farmers' Club. Charles J. Biddle, a brother of Craig Biddle's, was a guest.

⁹ Terry Maloney, son of a former employee at Forest Hill, was engaged in making a clean copy of the manuscript of Fisher's essay, an erudite plea for white supremacy based on the acceptance of slavery, soon to be published under the title *The Laws of Race as Connected with Slavery*.

¹⁰ Escorted by the mayor, the Prince of Wales and his suite had attended a gala performance of the opera *Martha* at the Academy of Music.

Prince and the reason is that he is an English Prince. As I said at the dinner, and all agreed with me, we would never have the same feeling or given such a reception to a member of any other royal family of Europe.

October 13, 1860 Finished correcting the essay in the morning. Took it to Hazard. He introduced me to his brother Willis, who, tho almost withdrawn from business, still publishes occasionally. He agreed at once to publish the work on fair terms. I shall thus have the advantage of the book's being sold by S. Hazard, whose shop is now fashionable in town.¹¹ In the paper this morning, the letter of the London correspondent states that on the 29th of last month my Dallas speech was republished in the London *Times*.¹² Went to the Exchange and there saw it in the *Times* of that date. Henry sent it to Chas. Morrison,¹³ who wrote that he had given it to a friend of his who is intimate with one of the editors, and asked him to try to have it published. So it is no great compliment to me, tho I suppose it would not have been reprinted unless they had thought well of it. There were some editorial remarks in the same paper on the subject, referring to & quoting my article, which, in another part, was printed in full, but no criticism of it. I think I will print it along with the essay. I told Hazard I would take him the mss. on Monday. In the evening revised it again. I must now finish my speech which is to be delivered next Wednesday.¹⁴

October 17, 1860 Got up at 5, breakfasted at 6, started at 7 & drove to the station at Prime and Broad.¹⁵ Got to Wilmington at 9½. Found Mr. Wales¹⁶ at the station & a carriage waiting for me. We drove out to a farm, which the New Castle Co. Society has just purchased, hoping to found an agricultural school & model farm. It is about two miles from Wilmington, contains 150 acres of good land

¹¹ Samuel Hazard, Jr., whose bookstore was at 724 Chestnut St.

¹² On Aug. 18, 1860, the *North American* published an article by Fisher in which he framed a speech the American minister to England, George Mifflin Dallas, might have delivered during an embarrassing incident in London.

¹³ Charles Morrison was a member of a wealthy English family whose extensive American investments were in the hands of the diarist's brother, Charles Henry Fisher.

¹⁴ Fisher had agreed to deliver a speech before the Agricultural Society of New Castle County.

¹⁵ Depot of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad.

¹⁶ Unidentified member of a large Wilmington family of that name.

tho rough and entirely out of order, land and buildings. There is, however, a stone barn and a farmhouse which by some repairs may be made sufficiently comfortable. The situation is beautiful, commanding a fine view over a richly wooded and hilly country. The price was \$150 per acre. I was welcomed by Canby, who is the president of the Society.¹⁷ I was to speak at 1½, so had time enough on my hands, which I spent pleasantly in walking about the grounds, looking at the stock, &c.

At 12½ we had lunch in the farmhouse at which some 6 or 8 members of the Society were present. These were all that had the appearance of respectable people at the exhibition, altho there was a large multitude assembled. The great majority were evidently an inferior class, attracted not by the objects interesting to a farmer of education, but by the race track, an attraction which has recently been introduced on these occasions for the express and avowed purpose of making money and which will destroy agricultural societies if persisted in. Prizes are offered to fast trotters, a mob is assembled, gambling is necessarily excited and the whole affair degraded & demoralized. Other meretricious attractions are permitted also for the same purpose, to draw a crowd who pay for admission. On this occasion, there were several tents where humbugs & catchpennies, dwarfs, deformed women, &c, were to be seen. Two or three vendors of quack medicines were haranguing gaping crowds about the grounds, and all the time scrub races, free to all comers, were going on.

At 1½ I went with some of the members to the platform. I saw at once that beyond a few around me there were none present who cared a farthing about anything I could say or felt the smallest interest in agriculture or any topic connected with it. I requested that the races on the track and the harangues of the vendors of quack medicines, &c, might be stopped. Then ensued an amusing scene. The horses were with difficulty withdrawn, but not the crowd around the course. About 50 feet to the left of me was a man addressing an admiring audience on the virtues of a wonderful kind of blacking he had for sale, & blacking boots with it to prove its excellence. At the same distance on the right, another orator was holding forth on the

¹⁷ James Canby.

virtues of his quack medicines, which he exhibited in boxes and vials. His eloquence had a great effect on the crowd, which numbered I should think about 200, & they greeted him with laughter & applause. I watched him when the officers went to him to request him to stop. He immediately turned round & pointing to me, went on: "I am told, gentlemen, that an address is now to be delivered about agriculture from that stand. Of course, I am willing to give way, that is parliamentary you know. I, gentlemen, am also an admirer of agriculture," &c, &c, for about five minutes longer.

When he ceased, however, his audience did not gather round my stand, but dispersed over the ground. In front of me were only about twenty persons, one half of them boys in their shirt sleeves. I said to Canby: "It is absurd to read an address to these. This is really no audience at all." He then went forward, "Gentlemen," said he, as loud as he could, "I wish to introduce to you Mr. Sidney George Fisher. He will deliver an interesting address about agriculture, he is himself a practical farmer." Even this appeal produced no effect. It was clear no one there cared either for the orator or his topic. Poor Canby was excessively mortified & so were the other members. Seeing this, I said, "Well, gentlemen, I will read my address to you & the few on the ground." Accordingly, I began & read 6 or 8 pages. I then skipped 8 or 10, & read a few more, finally I skipped to the part near the conclusion which notices the proposed school & model farm & then ended, occupying, I suppose, about 15 minutes. The members were profuse in thanks & regrets, but I treated the whole affair as a good joke, for so it really seemed to me. I did not fail, however, to point out to them how this was an illustration of the bad policy they were pursuing by using means to attract a vulgar crowd for the sake of making money & thus degrading their Society and defeating its purposes. I was then introduced to a reporter for one of the Wilmington papers, who requested me to let him have my manuscript that he might make an abstract of it for his paper. I objected to this as I knew by experience what sort of work reporters make by such attempts. He, however, & the members urged the matter so strongly that I said if he would come with me to the President's room, he might look over the mss. for an hour only, as I was obliged at 3 to go home. So we went & I threw the mss. on the table. He gave it a look of despair & said it was impossible for him to read & digest it in an

hour. I told him then that I would write the abstract for him, at which he seemed much relieved. I wrote a short statement of the principal matters & he was profuse in thanks.¹⁸ One of the members then drove me to town. The country around Wilmington is very picturesque & delightful views abound in all directions. Pretty cottages & countryseats adorn the neighborhood and the town itself thrives and grows rapidly.

October 19, 1860 Met old Dr. Meigs¹⁹ in the street yesterday. . . . The Doctor advised me to sell Mount Harmon²⁰ now for what it would bring, as he said the Union would be dissolved & we shall have Civil War in less than six months. He thinks the South will not stand the election of Lincoln. Today, I was told that the *New York Herald* makes the same prediction and that the Southern papers are very violent. The people in the South have been made to believe that the Republican Party are abolitionists. This is so far true, that the spirit, the animus of that party is undoubtedly aversion to slavery, tho I believe it is the intention of its leaders to pursue a very moderate course to the South and respect all its Constitutional rights. Nevertheless, it is true that the North has become hostile to slavery, it has also become united on this subject, and when the North is united it must govern the country. Consequently, the South will be governed by its enemies. The enmity, too, partakes of the nature of moral enthusiasm on a point about which the South is very sensitive and naturally, as everything valuable to them is involved in it.

October 25, 1860 Dined at Brookwood. The view from the piazza magnificent. Mr. & Mrs. Purviance there.²¹ Henry says there is but one subject talked about in town, and that is the chances of disunion. That the fear is universal. The crisis is indeed important and not without danger, yet I believe that much of the agitation is really confined to the press and the demagogues, who exaggerate all signs of danger to influence the elections & that the contest once over,

¹⁸ By order of the Society, one thousand copies of this speech were published at a cost of \$45—*An Address Delivered before the Agricultural Society of New Castle County by Sidney George Fisher of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1860).

¹⁹ Dr. Charles D. Meigs (1792–1869), professor of obstetrics and diseases of women at the Jefferson Medical College.

²⁰ Fisher's farm on the Sassafras River in Maryland.

²¹ Brookwood was the estate of the diarist's brother, Charles Henry Fisher, who was being visited by his sister-in-law and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. George D. Purviance of Baltimore.

quiet will be restored. Yet the result may be different, and then the trouble & misery in store for us are not to be calculated. Home at 10 by moonlight.

October 26, 1860 Went to Hazard's. Got a copy of the essay, which will not be ready till tomorrow. There is a panic in the money market because of the threats of disunion by the South. Henry in a state of great excitement. He is afraid my essay will increase the panic, altho, in fact, the argument justifies slavery. Gave him a copy.

October 27, 1860 Henry said so much about my essay & the injury it is likely to do if published at this time, that I consented to consult Mr. Harvey on the subject.²² He is the Washington correspondent of McMichael's paper and a clever man for such a post. He is Southern by birth and knows Southern men in Washington. I went to McMichael's office & saw him. I told him that to please my brother I wanted his opinion on one point only—the effect the book would have on the South. I read him parts of it, in which he saw nothing objectionable but the contrary. Whilst we, with McMichael, were talking, Henry came in. He pointed out what he thought the dangerous passages. The result was that I left the book with Harvey to read, saying that it should not be published till Monday, but that then I would hear what he had to say & form my own judgment about it.

Was not pleased with the interview. Henry assumed the air of a dictator to these men & pretty much told McMichael that he must not print anything in his paper not agreeable "*to us*," meaning the clique of businessmen whom he represents. McMichael borrows money from Henry, depends on the patronage of "businessmen." He is therefore their slave. Harvey writes for McMichael for a salary. Of course, whatever Henry says is a law for them. In this way money controls the press, as it does the elections, the legislature, &, in some cases, the judiciary. It is the old story, exemplified in history & everyday life also, of truth governed by expediency, of temporal interests rising up to forbid the free expression of opinion on the most important subjects. I understand Henry's motives perfectly. There

²² James E. Harvey, a South Carolinian by birth and education, was Washington correspondent of Morton McMichael's *North American* from 1844 to 1861. In 1861, President Lincoln appointed Harvey minister to Portugal. Elwyn B. Robinson, "The 'North American,'" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXIV (1940), 351.

is a panic in the money market which affects his interests, as disunion would be disastrous to them. My essay, which is a philosophical argument, temperate in language, perfectly free from party feeling or sectional bias and which, in fact, advocates many Southern views of the subject, nevertheless tells some truths not agreeable to the South about the dangers of its position. These Henry thinks will increase the excitement. But I think differently.

The essay is the first that has been written, which, taking the Northern ground of opposing the increase of slavery, at the same time justifies and advocates slavery. The thing the South fears is abolition, and my argument condemns abolition. I think its effect in the South will be to conciliate & inspire confidence, in the North, to inspire moderate views among the Republican party whose triumph by an overwhelming majority seems probable, & which therefore requires restraint & repression. The excesses of Southern & Northern Democrats have created the Republican party. It has become, as I predicted it would, the party of the populace & therefore liable to be influenced by blind and ignorant popular passion. It is as likely to go to extremes as the other side was. My book will have a tendency to moderate extreme sentiment & discourage fanaticism.

October 29, 1860 Tom Stewardson²³ came here at 10 o'clock. He had passed the night at Brookwood and came at Henry's request to talk to me about my essay & try to persuade me to repress it. This is too ridiculous. I heard what he had to say, which he had evidently carefully prepared, and the whole amounted to this, that altho the whole scope and tenor of the argument are calculated to conciliate the South and repress Northern fanaticism, there are some passages that might offend & might be misunderstood. Because of these, he thought the book had better be withheld in the present excited state of the country. In other words, sacrifice a positive good to a slight contingent evil. Henry no doubt sent him on this foolish errand & told him what to say. There is a panic in the money market produced by exaggerated statements of the passions & purposes of Southern men, for the double purpose of affecting the New York elections & speculating in stocks. Henry is a "bull," that is, it is his interest that stocks should not fall, but rise. He is therefore very nervous at anything printed on the subject. . . .

²³ Presumably Dr. Thomas Stewardson of 1830 Delancey Place.

I laughed at Stewardson a good [deal] about his fears & Henry's instructions, and told him that truth should not be sacrificed to expediency of any kind, far less to the schemes of the stock market. We went to town together. As I am very glad to relieve Henry's mind, altho I feel sure that his apprehensions are ill-founded, I went to see Mr. Harvey to ask his opinion after reading the essay. He spoke of it in high terms of commendation, said that it takes a new & important view of the subject, and that its influence is calculated to allay excitement, not increase it. Told all this to Henry & left him Harvey's note, which at my request he addressed to me, stating substantially as above. Went to Hazard's & told him to publish the work at once. Directed copies to some friends & institutions, Phila. Library, Atheneum, Am. Philosophical Society, &c. Hazard neglected to take out a copyright, so that if the book succeeds anyone may print it. I do not think, however, it is likely to have such a run as to tempt cupidity.

November 5, 1860 Tomorrow is election day, when the various passions and opinions of the people will find expression. It is a crisis no doubt of immense importance, for it *may* involve the fate of the Union, *may* be the signal for discord, destruction & bloodshed. The excitement is violent at the South and demagogues & agitators busy in the work of mischief. Reason is silent when passions are inflamed and designing, ambitious, reckless men may easily precipitate action that would destroy in a moment all hope of peace. On the other hand, even in the South, there is a strong force of opinion against extreme measures & the hopeless nature of a contest with the North, of weakness with strength, of 8 millions with 18 millions, must have its influence even with the most violent.

November 6, 1860 In the morning walked with Bet & Sidney to Maupay's to get a few trees to plant here.²⁴ Maupay much alarmed at the prospect of the times. He says his orders from the South have fallen off \$4000 a month in consequence of the fears there of disunion. . . .

Today is election day. I did not vote. I do not entirely like the animus of the Republican party. There is too much of hostility to the South in it. The anti-slavery party has become the party of the

²⁴ Samuel Maupay's nursery on Germantown Ave. north of Ellwood Lane was not far from Fisher's Forest Hill.

multitude. It has become so, indeed, because of the madness & crime & folly of the South, but there is danger of its going too far. I think that it will be prudent and conservative and I am glad to hear that it is to triumph, but I do not wish it to triumph by too great a majority. If the spirit by which it is animated were simply to restrain slavery within its present limits, but heartily to maintain it within those limits, I would vote for Lincoln. But it is leavened largely with a different feeling, a blind, reckless & enthusiastic hatred of slavery, without regard to the character of the Negro race, or to the consequences of abolition. How far this spirit may govern it remains to be seen, but its influence will be powerful & difficult to resist. How indeed can it be otherwise. Slavery is hateful in itself. The animating principle of all our institutions, the ruling passion of our race, is liberty. How can a people at once love liberty and love slavery. They must hate slavery, unless they are placed in circumstances, as the Southern men are, to make slavery a necessary thing for their own safety. But to realize such circumstances, to appreciate the reasoning by which slavery is justified because of them, is a process requiring too much thought & logic for the mind of the masses. They stop short at their hatred of slavery & act on that. But this is a very dangerous point for them to stop at. It involves the destruction of the Union & of the South. I wish to preserve both. I hope both may be preserved under Lincoln, but he has a difficult task before him, requiring much firmness, prudence, large views and courage to resist powerful influences.

November 7, 1860 The electric telegraph makes known now the result of an election all over the country. The majorities for Lincoln are even greater than was anticipated. Penna. gives 60,000, New York, 50,000. He is elected by the overwhelming voice of the Northern people. It remains now to be seen what the South will do. Will they dare forcibly to oppose their pigmy strength to this formidable array of power and opinion?

November 8, 1860 At 4 went to town, to a dinner of the Historical Society at the Continental Hotel.²⁵ About 100 were assembled in the large & handsome drawing room. Among them there were not

²⁵ Located at the southeast corner of Chestnut and Ninth streets, the Continental Hotel was the largest in the city and perhaps the newest, for it had opened for business on Feb. 16, 1860.

twenty that I ever saw before. The dinner was in a large & splendidly lighted hall, and was itself good & well served, tho not particularly elegant or choice. I sat opposite Ben Gerhard & next to Chas. Biddle.²⁶ On the other side of the latter was a friend of his to whom he introduced me, Judge Donnell of North Carolina,²⁷ a gentleman of large estate, whose mild, gentlemanlike manners & intelligent conversation pleased me much. We had some talk on the position of affairs in the South. He said that North Carolina would, he thought, undoubtedly sustain the Union, spoke of the folly of disunion and of the evidence which he saw everywhere that the Northern people were as a whole friendly & loyal to the South. I listened to two dull speeches & then came away & got home before 10 o'clk. The company was by no means distinguished in appearance, tho entirely respectable. Many certainly were not entitled to be members of a literary society.

November 21, 1860 At 3 drove, with Bet, to Brookwood where we dined. After dinner had some talk with Henry about the state of business affairs produced by the secession threats and movements in the South. He says the panic is as great as it was in 1857, that money cannot be got at any price and that if relief does not come in a few days, bankruptcy & confusion will ensue. That the banks will probably suspend, which would mitigate the pressure and enable those who owed money & had property to obtain the means of paying debts. He said also that his own position is very critical and that he may very possibly break, tho he thinks he can get thro. That he has paid \$750,000 within the last two weeks, has abundant securities, which are unsaleable, & could draw on England to any amount, but bills of exchange cannot be sold, so that it will be difficult to meet his engagements. This was no pleasant news, tho a thing I have always looked forward to for Henry.

November 22, 1860 Went to town in no small anxiety at 11. The banks of the city suspended at 12, which relieved my mind as to Henry, for he has most ample means, if he can only make them available, which this measure of the banks will no doubt enable him to do. Various reasons induced the suspension—a threatened run, which would have drained them of their specie, the suspension of the banks

²⁶ Benjamin Gerhard and Charles J. Biddle were both Philadelphia lawyers.

²⁷ Judge John R. Donnel (1791-1864). John H. Wheeler, *Reminiscences and Memoirs of North Carolina and Eminent North Carolinians* (Columbus, Ohio, 1884), 139.

of Charleston, Virginia & Baltimore, and the desire to relieve the business community here & prevent sacrifices. The banks are strong, the merchants are strong, the country never more prosperous and full of wealth, but there is a panic, which at once withdraws money, specie, from circulation. The means of making exchanges are thus suddenly curtailed, consequently debts cannot be paid without ruinous sacrifices of property to obtain those means. By suspending, the banks furnish a temporary currency. The measure was wise & prudent & will be safe as the banks will probably resume in a few weeks, unless things at the South become worse.

November 23, 1860 Bet has a sewing machine which is a great pleasure to her now that she is able to work it with skill. How these inventions come, one after another, to facilitate labor & multiply & cheapen the comforts & accommodations of life. This ingenious little machine performs in an hour as much work as could be done with a needle in a day, and it is very pleasant employment to use it—many ladies become very fond of the occupation & prefer it to a piano. Then there is the air-tight coal stove which gives abundance of heat at very slight trouble or expence. Coal oil, now very generally burned in lamps, is another late discovery. It is half the expence of common oil and, I suppose, a 10th that of sperm candles. My lamp gives as much light as four candles and burns twice as long.

November 24, 1860 At 2 I drove up to Alverthorpe to dinner.²⁸ It was very cold but I went in the farm wagon which has a standing top and curtains, and with fur gloves, thick overcoat & blanket was comfortable enough and enjoyed the drive. I had scarcely got seated in the library when we all began to talk on the absorbing topic of disunion, they introducing the subject, as they said it had become too interesting to refrain. Our talk was only interrupted by dinner at 4, and I staid till 7. During dinner the subject was dropped because of the presence of the Negro servants in attendance.

Harry Middleton²⁹ and I discussed the subject almost exclusively, the rest listening to us, and I must do him the justice to say that he was sensible in his views, fair in argument, perfectly gentlemanlike and good-humored. The ground he took was that the election of Lincoln by large majorities in all the Northern states proved that the

²⁸ Alverthorpe was the residence near Jenkintown of the diarist's cousin, Joshua Francis Fisher.

²⁹ Harry Middleton of South Carolina was a brother of J. F. Fisher's wife.

North was more powerful than the South, that it was united in hostility to Southern institutions and interests, that the South held & must always hold an inferior position in the Union & be governed by an outside and unfriendly power and, therefore, it was the policy of the South, both as matter of interest and of honor, to secede now, form a new and independent empire united by the interests of slavery and to govern itself. That the hostile feelings of the North were exhibited not merely by the sectional vote for Lincoln, but by legislation intended to obstruct the execution of the fugitive slave law, by the permitted efforts of the underground railroad societies, and by the haranguing & writings of avowed abolitionists.

He said, moreover, that the Southern states, if united, had resources, wealth, and population enough to form a powerful and independent nation, more especially as they produced exclusively the great staples of commerce which made all nations tributary to them. He said also that the avowed policy of the North was to restrict slavery to its present limits, to hem in the states where it exists & subject them to the burden & danger of a rapidly increasing Negro population, without the possibility of expansion, either by occupying national territory or by acquiring new territory over which to spread an inferior race whose numbers would in time become an inconvenience & a peril. That the South had equal rights with the North to the territories & to exclude Southern men from them was an insult as well as an injury. That for all these evils and dangers, a great Southern confederacy, which could, at its pleasure, extend its sway over adjacent tropical regions, over the West Indies, Mexico, & Central America, with slavery as its foundation & cotton, sugar, rice, & tobacco as its sources of wealth & prosperity, was the true remedy.

To this I replied that if it be true that the election of Lincoln did, in fact, indicate a general and settled hostile purpose & feeling on the part of the North to the South, a secession and a united Southern confederacy would be a policy dictated at any rate by honorable feeling and if it could be effected, by interest also. But, in truth, the election of Lincoln proves no such state of opinion in the North. That, in the first place, both Breckenridge & Douglas³⁰ had a large

³⁰ John C. Breckinridge (1821-1875) and Stephen A. Douglas (1813-1861) were presidential candidates of the disrupted Democratic Party.

vote in the Northern states, & that both of these were representatives of Southern interests. That slavery, tho the chief, was by no means the only issue in the late election, but the tariff and the corruptions and excesses of the administration were very influential in producing the result. That the fact that Seward was dropped & Lincoln selected was in itself a proof of the moderate views of the Republican party. That the great masses of that party were perfectly loyal to the South and would at once disapprove & resist any measures intended for its injury. That Lincoln himself could do nothing, even if disposed, without the consent of Congress, and that the South had for its protection the Senate & the House of Representatives, in both which there was a majority in its favor, so that possessing thus ample Constitutional means of defence, it was madness to seek that defence in revolution, which could only be justified when all Constitutional means had been exhausted. As to the exclusion of the South from the territories, the doctrine & practice of the government had been that Congress had supreme control over the territories & ought to govern them & had governed them for their own good, either prohibiting or preventing slavery according to the exigencies of soil & climate & the wishes of the inhabitants. That this practice had never been departed from except in the case of Kansas, when the South attempted to force slavery on a territory in defiance of the express wish of nine-tenths of its people, out of which attempt had grown all the present troubles & the success of the Republican party. The laws of the Northern states obstructing the execution of the fugitive slave law were the consequences of that excitement. That most of them, if fairly examined, were, in fact, nothing more than the expression of a natural & just Northern sentiment—aversion to slavery in the abstract but a willingness to permit the general government to perform its Constitutional obligations by executing the law by its own officers.

I do not know that what I said produced much effect, for it was evident to me that in him, as in the South generally, the real grievance is the being obliged to give up power after having exercised it so long. Stopped to see Henry on my way home. The suspension has relieved his fears for the present. I told him I thought he and all men should prepare for the worst.

November 25, 1860 My last volume closed with an account of the alarm caused by prospects of disunion. The South is enraged by

the election of Lincoln, which is regarded there as evidence of a settled hostility to slavery and of a design to exercise the powers of the government to the injury of the Southern people. That this opinion is really entertained by many is, no doubt, true. Much of the passion displayed, however, is the result of defeat, of loss of power. The Southern people are arrogant and self-willed. They have been accustomed generally to govern the country, always to have large influence in the government. They cannot bear to lose power, and to submit to the control of the North, of a party composed in part of abolitionists, exasperates their pride. How far they will carry their opposition remains to be seen. The indications are very gloomy. Revolutions are brought about by passion and passions are now greatly excited. It is by no means improbable that I shall be obliged to record in this volume the destruction of our government.

November 26, 1860 Southern news more unfavorable, public meetings & violent speeches in Charleston, Georgia, Mississippi & Alabama, secession resolutions passed by legislatures & recommended by governors of those states, a blaze of excitement everywhere. Drove Bet up Germantown to pay visits at the Ben Rush's³¹ and at Cliveden. Rush lives in a cottage at Mount Airy. Left cards. Got in at Cliveden & had some talk with Miss Chew.³² It is a fine, picturesque old mansion with large rooms, but house and grounds woefully out of repair.

November 28, 1860 There has recently been delivered in Georgia a very conservative speech by Mr. A. H. Stevens,³³ a gentleman of some note in Southern public life. It is thought a good indication & to afford some hope of a proper feeling in Georgia & the South. Some gentlemen here thought a good effect would be produced if an answer to it, responding to its just opinions, were written & published here. They asked me to write such a letter. Went with Henry to see Mr. Mercer, pres. of F & M Bank,³⁴ on the subject. He suggested my name to the others. Agreed to write the

³¹ Benjamin Rush was the oldest son of Richard Rush and had served as secretary of legation for his father when the latter was minister to England.

³² Miss Anne Chew (1805-1892), owner of Cliveden, the Chew House in Germantown.

³³ Alexander H. Stephens (1812-1883), soon to be elected vice-president of the Confederacy.

³⁴ Singleton A. Mercer, president of the Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank, was considered to be the city's leading bank president.

letter by Friday. Went to see photographs taken of Mr. Ingersoll and of Sidney some days ago.³⁵ Both good, Sidney's particularly so. Mr. Ingersoll's looks too old. Home at 5 to dinner. In the evening began the letter.

November 30, 1860 Took ink & pencil mss. to town at 12. A number of gentlemen met in Henry's office. Read the letter to them. They all say it is too long and that it goes so much into detail of argument on disputed points that it would be impossible to get a proper number of persons who would agree to all parts of it & be willing to sign it. Some would object to one part, some to another. They were right. At their request, I agreed to write a shorter one, avoiding doubtful points. Home to dinner. In the evening wrote another letter. The argument amounts to this. Secession, whether the right to make it be Constitutional or not, is an extreme remedy equivalent to revolution. Revolution is a step which cannot be justified unless grievances be real & serious and unless all legal & peaceable means of redress have been tried & have failed. Now, the fact is that at this time the country is in the enjoyment of universal & unequalled prosperity. It is also true that up to this moment slavery has been safe & has flourished as it never did anywhere else. These two facts decide the question so far as revolution is concerned. By their side, all alleged grievances of the South, supposing all charges to be true, are insignificant. To overturn a government in the midst of prosperity and for the sake of an interest, which, under the protection of that government has constantly grown & expanded, would be folly. These arguments may have some effect on the public opinion in the South, which it is hoped may control the madmen who are driving the country to ruin.

December 1, 1860 Took letter to town. Read it to several at Henry's office who approved it & decided that it should be printed in a shape to be signed. Took it to Sherman³⁶ who agreed to have 100 copies ready by 5 o'clock.

December 3, 1860 Not many had signed the letter, as everyone could not agree to every point & expression in it. The Democrats thought it not sufficiently respectful to the South, the Republicans

³⁵ Charles J. Ingersoll (1782-1862), father-in-law of the diarist, and the diarist's son, Sydney George Fisher (1856-1927).

³⁶ C. Sherman, Philadelphia printer.

not sufficiently so to Mr. Lincoln; one would not say that this government had always sustained slavery, another would not agree that slavery suited the Negro race, &c., &c. A good many names, however, were signed. I told Mr. Mercer that I would not alter the letter but that he & the gentlemen with him might make any use of it they pleased.

December 4, 1860 Congress met yesterday. Members seemed all in good humor. Some propositions looking to a compromise have been made. The opinion, however, seems to be that disunion is inevitable and the only question is whether it shall be peaceful or accompanied by civil war.

December 6, 1860 The great point just now is to gain time, so that deliberation may be had, passions cool, and the sound opinion which undoubtedly exists in the Southern states have an opportunity to form itself & find organs for expression. It is now kept down by a system of terrorism and by the overpowering influence of an oligarchy which assumes the right to dictate. The immediate danger seems narrowed to the risk of a hostile collision between the government & the people of that passionate, factious, headlong, impracticable little state of So. Carolina. If its people should make an attack on Fort Moultrie, which they threaten, or if they should forcibly resist the collection of the revenue, then the risk is extreme that the fire of civil war would be kindled & would spread into such proportions that the question would become, which shall conquer, North or South.

December 7, 1860 My Stephens letter has been numerously signed and was sent to him today.

December 12, 1860 Went to see Fisher in town.³⁷ He has published a pamphlet on the times, entitled "Concessions & Compromises." He has had 4000 printed and was in great excitement, directing them for the post office as they are to be widely distributed. He seemed evidently to think he had discovered a remedy for all our troubles and his manner was not a little amusing. He gave me some copies to distribute. Read it when I got home. Some of the suggestions are sensible enough, others impracticable & ill-considered, much

³⁷ Joshua Francis Fisher's town house was at 919 Walnut St.

excitement visible in the style. Altogether it amounts to nothing, tho it may do good as it is short, quite well expressed and practical. What he says about the fugitive slave law is very well worth considering.

December 13, 1860 A pamphlet was sent me yesterday by the author, Mr. Stephen Colwell,³⁸ whom I do not know, but am told he is a very worthy & intelligent merchant, by birth a Virginian. It is well written and its object is to show that the South & slavery can only be safe in the Union & under the Constitution, that the only foundation or excuse for slavery is the good of the Negro race and that secession would be destructive to every interest of the South. These are the opinions I have always advocated, but I begin now to think that tho the Union can alone protect slavery, it cannot protect it long. The opinion of the civilized world is against the institution and tho cotton is king, it is only king on the Exchange. Morality is progressive, its progress is reflected & stimulated by literature and the moral & enlightened sentiment of mankind is too strong for material interest. Civilized nations are governed not by force but by opinion, Northern opinion is averse to slavery, is becoming more hostile to it every day, & this hostility is constantly increased by the outrages of the South. These outrages have at length reached the point of attempted revolution for the sake of slavery. The late election was a protest against Southern dictation, it was a protest against the corruption & abuses of the Democratic party, it was to a great extent an expression of hatred to slavery itself, and it was a declaration that power resides, not with weakness, but with strength, and that it is an attribute of power to govern. Strength & power are with the North, weakness and slavery are with the South. The utmost that the South can expect in the Union is toleration of slavery, not hearty approbation and support of it. The agitation of the subject must therefore go on & will always necessarily form a question of party politics. Now this discussion and excitement are dangerous things for slavery. It inspires the Negroes with the idea & desire for freedom, it assures them of sympathizers and friends and tends

³⁸ Stephen Colwell (1800-1871), political economist and iron manufacturer of Conshohocken, was a supporter of the Union and later a founder of the Union League of Philadelphia.

directly to revolt & servile war. When this spirit reaches a certain point, the sense of security is destroyed, business loses energy, capital disappears, decay commences, & finally society is so weakened that emancipation, voluntary or forcible, must be the result. Southern men instinctively feel this and hence their desire to separate from this dangerous North, which must govern them and even while giving them protection, must also, by a fatal necessity, undermine the institution on which their social system is founded. But how can they separate? That is the difficult question. Suppose the North says, as by right & law it may, separation is treason and you shall not go. The result would be a civil war, and the first gun fired in such a war would sound the knell of slavery.

December 16, 1860 At 3 drove up to Henry's. He says that Mr. Henry Ward Beecher,³⁹ a noted abolitionist, is to deliver a lecture in town on Friday for a literary society and that trouble is anticipated. The Democrats are likely to make a riot and the Republicans declare they will organize to defend him. This is another indication of the danger of attempting to coerce the Southern states. It would produce a civil war not only between sections but between parties throughout the country—civil war with anarchy, in short. It shows too the nature of democracy & how surely it leads thro popular violence to military despotism. The South has destroyed liberty of speech and of the press for the sake of slavery at home; the adherents of the South are attempting the same thing here. It is a dangerous thing, people say, to permit lectures and speeches about slavery at such a time; they add to excitement, they irritate the South, they may even tend to stir up the Negroes to revolt; therefore they should be frowned down according to some, or hissed down or knocked down according to others. Last year Mr. Curtis⁴⁰ came here, about the time of John Brown's attempt in Virginia, to deliver a lecture on the times. He was threatened with violence, but he was protected by the mayor⁴¹ on the ground that liberty of speech must be maintained. The lecture was delivered, the building was surrounded by a shouting, hooting mob, but the presence of a strong police force prevented

³⁹ Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887), Presbyterian clergyman.

⁴⁰ George W. Curtis (1824–1892).

⁴¹ Alexander Henry.

serious violence, otherwise there would have been a fearful riot, as Mr. Henry told me himself.

December 21, 1860 The convention of South Carolina passed an ordinance yesterday declaring the state to be no longer a member of the Union, but a sovereign & independent nation. In the debate which ensued, some of the difficulties of the new position became apparent. They could give no clearances to vessels leaving their ports. Consequently, all commerce was at once stopped, as a vessel without a clearance would not be received at foreign ports & would be without protection on the high seas, having no flag or national character. They have no post office, & without mails all business must cease. It would really seem as if these very obvious difficulties had never suggested themselves to the minds of the actors in this tragi-comic scene, for the speeches are marked with trepidation & conflicting counsels on subjects in relation to which some definite course of action ought beforehand to have been determined on. One member declared that they were homeless & houseless & that the ships would rot in their ports. After much floundering, the only conclusion they arrived at was that Mr. Buchanan *being their friend*, he would no doubt allow them to use the officers of the U. S., both of the custom house and post office, until the arrangements of the new nation could be perfected. That is to say, they appeal to the government for aid to enable them to break up the Union. This is cool certainly, and not very consistent with "the honor & dignity of So. Carolina," about which they talk so much. Such has been the first formal step in the course of events which may turn out to be either a farce or a mournful tragedy.

December 25, 1860 Christmas. Delightful winter weather. Therm. 32. Of course, a stocking was hung at Sidney's bed last night, filled with pretty things and he went to rest, entirely convinced of the reality of Christkingle and full of hope. At dawn he was awake and the first thing he said was, "Has Kriskingle been here & has he brought me anything, if he has, I shall be *so* pleased." As soon as the light permitted, he examined the stocking and was in raptures at its contents and at the toys on a chair by his little bed. This was all very delightful to witness and I think we were more pleased than he.

The perilous state of the country occupied my thoughts, and my plan of legalizing secession, of making it easy & safe, since secession is to be, appeared to me the only proper remedy. I determined to write an article on the subject, as strong convictions naturally seek expression and one cannot help thinking that what seems to him true will convince others and thus produce a good result. Accordingly, began the article & worked at it morning and evening.

December 26, 1860 Henry and Pierce Butler here for a few moments on their way to Brookwood. Butler is eager for secession & has just returned from Georgia, where he says there is no difference of opinion. He said that he came here only to *buy arms* and intends to return immediately and join the army. He will take his daughter Fanny with him and has bought a rifle for *her*, too, for he says even the women in the South are going to fight. What madness, yet one cannot help admiring the knightly spirit these Southern men are displaying. They rush recklessly on fearful odds & fearful dangers and talk like men insane. Yet is there not reason for the wild excitement they exhibit? Is it not really terror, the instinctive dread of approaching peril which they think they can baffle by fronting and defying? The power of the North is overwhelming if it should be used against them.

December 28, 1860 The news is that the people of Charleston have taken Fort Moultrie. There are two forts in the harbour, Moultrie and Sumter. The first is so situated that it could not be defended at all by Capt. Anderson's⁴² small force—the 2nd could be made impregnable by that force. The orders of the President were that he should defend the fort, yet he was refused reinforcements when he demanded them because the President feared that the sending them there would increase the excitement in So. Carolina & lead to a collision. Capt. Anderson has, it seems, on his own responsibility, rather than sacrifice his men and a position which he could not hold if attacked, removed to one, Fort Sumter, that he can maintain. He spiked the guns when he went and soon after a body of troops from Charleston took possession of the fort. This event has produced much feeling everywhere. The commissioners from So. Carolina, sent to Washington to treat with the President, now

⁴⁴ John Buchanan Floyd (1806-1863) was to serve as a Confederate general.

demand that the President shall withdraw the force from Fort Sumter, and it is thought that he will do so.

December 31, 1860 The article "Legalized Secession" was in the paper this morning.⁴³ Mr. Floyd,⁴⁴ Secty of War, has resigned, because at a meeting of the Cabinet it was resolved that Capt. Anderson should not be remanded to Fort Moultrie as required by the commissioners of So. Carolina. This decision & his withdrawal inspire hope at Washington that some firmness will be shown by the government to vindicate its dignity. Genl. Scott has expressed very decided opinions and advised the President from the first to reinforce all the Southern forts.

⁴² Maj. Robert Anderson (1805-1871).

⁴³ Fisher published this article in the *North American* over the name "Cecil." Since secession appeared inevitable, he thought it best to give it legal status by passing certain laws. "Let us therefore open the door wide to our southern friends, and say to them, 'depart in peace, we will not detain you against your will.' . . . To cry Union when there is no Union, is like crying peace, peace, when there is no peace. If the Union be broken, we should acknowledge the fact and on that build our arguments and policy."