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Nicholas Biddle in Europe, 1804-1807

While many modern scholars have studied Europeans traveling in America during our early history, few have turned their attention to the reverse phenomenon—Americans visiting the Continent and England. In the eighteenth century, European travel for reasons other than commercial was rare for Americans. Moreover, travel on the Continent was severely restricted in the early nineteenth century by the political turmoil resulting from the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars.[1]

In this latter period, a unique opportunity was offered to eighteen-year-old Nicholas Biddle to go abroad as a member of the staff of the United States Minister to France. It was a family friendship, that of Biddle's father Charles with General John Armstrong, which made this possible. Armstrong, appointed Minister to France, invited Biddle to come with him as an unpaid secretary. Believing it would aid the young man's career, his parents consented to his acceptance and supplied him with a small allowance for living expenses and travel.

1 Accounts of Europeans traveling in America are far too numerous to list here. Of the few works dealing with Americans in Europe, Foster Rhea Dulles, *Americans Abroad* (Ann Arbor, 1964), has one chapter on the period before 1815.

Biddle's professional duties as secretary to Armstrong and later to James Monroe in England sharpened his business skills and taught him diplomacy in dealing with people, but his leisure hours were no less dedicated to learning. Always a voracious reader and a fine linguist, Biddle studied literature and languages with uncommon application. When at liberty to travel, he made thorough and systematic excursions into Italy and Greece, traveling also through Germany, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland and the Low Countries. He was a careful and conscientious observer, recording his activities and thoughts in notebook after notebook.

Until recently, Biddle's life during his foreign visit was known only from letters and a single diary of his trip to Greece. But in the summer of 1977, fourteen more diaries were discovered among other papers in an outbuilding at Andalusia, his country estate.[2] These journals, now at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, provide a more complete picture of Biddle's life during this period.

No two of them are alike, indicating that Biddle probably bought each notebook as he filled up the preceding one. Some are short, containing only a few pages of scattered observations. Others are filled with extensive notes on subjects which interested him, and detailed accounts of his experiences. They include a few sketches, especially of ruins of ancient Greek buildings. Carefully kept personal records, the diaries not only describe visits to libraries, art collections, and other sights, but also reveal Biddle's ideas in relation to important aspects of his thought and philosophy. His American viewpoint and bias are clear throughout.

These records disclose that his years in Europe were highly formative ones in his life. Building on a foundation developed in his early education, Biddle used the period of his European residence to continue his studies, to examine places and people, and to look within himself to determine his talents, strengths, and goals in life.

2 Biddle's first Greek diary was the subject of William N. Bates, "Nicholas Biddle's Journey to Greece," *Proceedings of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Pennsylvania*, XXVIII (1919), 167–183. Biddle's impressions of Napoleon's coronation and his report of his conversations with Benjamin West were printed by Nicholas B. Wainwright in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, CII (1978), 103–114. Biddle's European diaries are otherwise unpublished.

Unusually precocious, Nicholas Biddle had entered the University of Pennsylvania at ten and Princeton at thirteen.[3] Surviving manuscripts written by him in the course of his Princeton career document this early intellectual promise and seriousness of purpose. In a series of essays and speeches he explored problems which interested him. Some of these touch on topics which relate directly to travel or to his ideas about his life's direction.

Biddle was conscious of the opportunities afforded by his privileged position as child of a well-to-do merchant who could afford to place his son in college, and he eagerly accepted the leadership ethic which a Princeton education instilled.[4] He recognized that his education developed his taste for reading and learning, enabling him to use his time to best advantage for self-development. Language study was an important element. He believed that businessmen had no need for knowledge of Latin and ancient Greek, but for someone who aspired as he did to a leadership role mastery of these languages was necessary.[5]

He also thought about his position as a citizen of the world. Recognizing that local prejudices could be so strong as to preclude the acceptance of beneficial innovations, he wrote that men limited to their own customs were "naturally damped in their ardor for study and improvement, through fear that their knowledge may teach them something contrary to the established manners and show them others similar to those of their enemy."[6]

In another student essay he described the benefits of travel:

[3] Biddle graduated from Princeton at fifteen, youngest to that date and perhaps since. See Thomas P. Govan, *Nicholas Biddle, Nationalist and Public Banker, 1786–1844* (Chicago, 1959), for the best work on Biddle's life and career, though with an emphasis on the Bank; and Govan, "Nicholas Biddle at Princeton," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, IX (1947), 49–61, for a description of college life.

[4] An interesting comparison can be drawn between Biddle and the sons of New England merchants. See Peter Dobkin Hall, "Family Structure and Economic Organization: Massachusetts Merchants, 1700–1850," *Family and Kin in Urban Communities*, Tamara Hareven, ed. (New York, 1977), especially 54–57. It would appear that the first generation of college-educated sons of merchants in New England had the same attitude toward the obligation of assuming leadership which Biddle shared.

[5] "On the Advantages of a Good Education," Biddle Papers, CXXVII, 148, Library of Congress; "On the Study of the Dead Languages," Wainwright Collection, I, 11, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[6] "On Overcoming Prejudice," Wainwright Collection, I, 24.

amidst the numerous advantages to be gained from traveling the greatest, and most essential are those moral reflections which naturally present themselves to the mind at the sight of what is great, grand, or magnificent. Hence one man does not exceed another merely because he has seen the curiosities and grandeur of foreign nations, but only as he has made use of these objects as incitements to virtue and morality.[7]

Thus, long before his own opportunity for foreign travel came, Biddle had a conception of the moral improvement which could come through it, and the obligation of the traveler to analyze and learn from his experiences.

The period between Biddle's graduation from Princeton in September 1801 and his embarkation for Europe three years later was occupied by legal studies with his brother William and the well-known Philadelphia lawyer William Lewis, and by a wide-ranging schedule of reading. His library included a great many works on French literature and history, so that he was acquainted with the institutions of that country before setting foot on French soil.[8]

It was during this time that Biddle met Joseph Dennie, editor of the newly founded *Port Folio*, and probably contributed a few humorous pieces to the periodical.[9] The *Port Folio* was perhaps the most important American literary journal at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Biddle took an early interest in it, and later became its editor. Dennie, Biddle, and other Philadelphians met informally as the Tuesday Club, which gave Biddle an opportunity for discussing literature.

When General Armstrong invited Biddle to accompany him to France, he accepted with alacrity. His friends, too, were pleased at his opportunity, but reminded him of his obligations. A Princeton classmate, congratulating him on his good fortune, and cautioning him not to waste his time frivolously, observed:

By this journey you may (& I have no doubt but you will) become acquainted with the most latent springs of the human heart, & the nicest

[7] *Ibid.*, I, 36.

[8] Biddle's personal library was considerably augmented by a gift of a few hundred books, many of them on French literature or politics, from Dr. Enoch Edwards, a friend of the Biddle family.

[9] *Port Folio*, IV (1804), 49, 217. Attributions by Govan.

changes & principles of Government. It is not in a good & tranquill Government that men will learn. But it is in a great one, corrupt & fallen, where you can view the different pieces of a great & dissected Mass, & scrutinize the internal parts as well as the external.[10]

His father, more restrained in his advice, reminded Nicholas that by doing his duty he would please his parents.[11] The eminent William Lewis emphasized his faith in his young pupil's capabilities and potential for service, charged him to perform his work with distinction, and exhorted him to bring honor to his family.[12] Biddle, in thanking Lewis for his kindness and tutelage, promised to remember his admonitions.

Be assured my Dear Sir that your interference in my behalf shall not be forgotten; it has added another to the thousand motives which stimulate me to honorable exertion, and I feel myself bound to prove that it has not been applied unworthily. I shall enter on the duties of my new situations with the timid diffidence of conscious inexperience and the humbling solicitude which a wish to give general satisfaction can alone inspire. . . .[13]

Extravagant as his language was, there can be no doubt of Biddle's seriousness of purpose. He was ready for the new post and new experiences, and hoped to be able to do some traveling before returning to America. But in September 1804 he had no idea of how extensive his travels were actually to be.[14]

As for his diary, in addition to his natural desire to record his travels for his own benefit and for the interest of his family and friends, it is possible that he was influenced by his father's suggestion that its publication might bring him additional funds for his support abroad.[15] At all events, he started his diary on September 4, 1804, the day of his departure when the captain refused to wait for late-

10 Elias Ellmaker to N. B., Lancaster, July 22, 1804, Biddle Papers, CXXVII, 248–249, Library of Congress.

11 Charles Biddle to N. B., July 30, 1804, Wainwright Collection, I, 60.

12 William Lewis to N. B., July 19, 1804, Biddle Papers, CXXVII, 19, Library of Congress.

13 N. B. to William Lewis, July 20, 1804, *ibid.*, 21.

14 Biddle received permission to travel to Italy and Greece only after some time in Europe; the original plans were spelled out in a letter from Charles Biddle, July 30, 1804, when he spoke of Nicholas going to Bordeaux the following spring before proceeding on to Philadelphia or London. Wainwright Collection, I, 46.

15 *Ibid.*, I, 60.

comers and Mrs. Jerome Bonaparte was left behind. Biddle rationalized this by conjecturing that if she had gone to Europe she would have become corrupted by foreign manners, leading at best "a life of splendid & disreputable misery."[16] She would be happier, Biddle believed, remaining in America.

He passed the thirty-eight days of the voyage in reading, and improving his French through conversation with French passengers. Upon landing at Painboeuf on October 10, he made his way to Paris by way of Nantes, Angers, Saumur, Tours, Amboise, Blois and Orleans, reaching the French capital November 7, 1804.

Once settled at the Ministry, Biddle found that his duties were chiefly concerned with American claims against France which had been assumed by the American government as part of the terms of the Louisiana Purchase. This gave the young man practical experience in dealing with large sums of money and in solving financial problems. He apparently was able to travel in the neighborhood of Paris during this period, ranging as far as Boudy, Château Thierry, Epernay, Vitry and Meaux, although his diary entries are often undated and sparse during these months when secretarial business occupied his time and energy.

In the summer of 1805, Biddle began his more extensive travels, setting out through eastern France for Switzerland, where he spent the month of August. After a brief return to Paris, he left for Rome on November 27, 1805, traveling via Poitiers, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Montpellier, Nîmes, Avignon, Marseilles, Nice, Genoa and Florence. Only a few weeks of his Roman stay are recorded, February 4 through 28; no diary entries are known for the entire month of March 1806.[17]

Biddle explored Naples and Greece from April through August 1806, visiting many classical sites as well as the modern cities of

[16] Biddle diaries (I, Sept. 4, 1804). Subsequent citations to the diaries are given as exactly as the material allows in the copy of my thesis on file at the University of Delaware. Those diaries which are paginated have references cited by page number; those where dates can be determined are cited in that manner. For some of the journals reference can be given only to diary number.

[17] It is possible that missing diaries may yet come to light to fill in the unrecorded gaps, but it seems more likely that Biddle kept a diary more scrupulously while traveling than when settled in one place for any length of time.

Athens and Sparta, with a side trip to the isle of Malta. In late summer he went from Trieste to Vienna by way of Venice. He took an excursion from Vienna into Hungary. On his way back to Paris he passed through eastern France and the Low Countries, arriving at Gravesend in England in March 1807. He spent the spring and summer in England as secretary to Monroe, keeping a diary only sporadically, and then sailed for America.

Biddle's conscientiousness in recording his travels was paralleled by the care he took in preparing for them and the enthusiasm with which he embarked upon them. He wished to be accepted and respected as a valuable member of society wherever he went in Europe, and sought to assure this by obtaining an honorary Master of Arts degree from Princeton, justified by his additional study since graduation, and by requesting an honorary army rank from a conveniently-placed kinsman, General James Wilkinson. He also sought to smooth his path with letters of introduction vouching for his character from such notables as Stephen Girard and Aaron Burr.[18]

Once abroad, he avoided the common practice of keeping to one's own countrymen. He considered young men of a background similar to his own poor traveling companions, for one could learn little from them. Instead, he sought out older travelers and people native to the countries he visited, questioning them eagerly about their experiences. His talent with languages proved extremely useful, for he was able to speak fluently in French, Greek, and Italian, and at least keep up a conversation in German and Dutch. He engaged language masters, readying himself ahead of time to be able to speak with people of each country.

He was especially interested in the political and social conditions in the areas he visited. In France, Biddle asked questions about the Revolution, particularly of one man who had been imprisoned and condemned to death, but released under the law of 9 Thermidor. A Greek bishop told him of oppression by the Turks. His queries

[18] Aaron Burr to William T. Broome, July 30, 1804: "My young friend N. B. has at the age of 19 or 20 attained the reputation of uncommon talents and acquirements & it is said, and I believe with truth, that as a writer he is at this early age classical & elegant—If he be the author of some pieces which are ascribed to him, he is certainly a very extraordinary youth." Biddle Manuscripts at Andalusia. In Biddle's second diary (Nov. 19, 1804) he wrote of going to see one M. Perregaux, "banquière très riche avec un lettre du Mr. Girard."

about the English borough system were answered with thoroughness by a Cornishman. In Switzerland, he summed up his attitude about speaking with strangers: "I hate to pass a man without talking to him."

As a traveler he welcomed new experiences. "A cosmopolite would be delighted with my accommodating temper," he wrote of his learning to sit on the floor and eat from a low table; sitting crosslegged taught him the superfluousness of a chair. Among the new foods he sampled, he recorded his reactions to yogurt and to a snail, "which was really not bad." He also waltzed for the first time. Although generally displaying a maturity beyond his years, Biddle recorded escapades typical of other travelers of his age: he stole a kiss from a girl selling fruit in Switzerland, became inebriated in France, and carved his name among the other graffiti on the staircase at Blois.

Biddle was capable of great energy when there was the prospect of seeing something new. His itinerary in a single day could include, as for instance in Florence, the Baptistry, Cathedral, Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella, San Marco, the Annunziata, Michelangelo's and Vespucci's houses, the Palazzi Corsini and Strozzi, and at night a spectacle. Occasionally, though not often, fatigue dulled his curiosity, and he recorded his failure to see a particular sight.

Biddle's travel was not limited to the purpose of personal enjoyment. His intentness was partially due to his role as cultural intermediary in transmitting information and sometimes objects to friends in America. In the performance of his duties as secretary to the Ministry he assisted many Americans in pursuing legal claims. His relative Clement Biddle requested a list of all cases involving Pennsylvanians and claims likely to be made on the Bank of Pennsylvania.[19] He sent seeds to Dr. Benjamin Barton of Philadelphia and bought grapevine roots for his brother. He arranged for casts of famous statues to be sent to the newly-founded Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

In keeping his diary Biddle was mindful of his family and at one point sent them a portion of it. It was well received, as his brother William informed him.

19 Clement Biddle to N. B., Apr. 10, 1805, Biddle Manuscripts at Andalusia.

To be thus minutely informed of yourself and of the objects which engaged your attention you may readily imagine was a high satisfaction to the family. It has afforded amusement & information to us as well as to your friends who have solicited and obtained a perusal. As the practice of journalizing is useful to yourself as well as agreeable to us, you must continue it & at all events not fail to give us full accounts of your studies and of every thing which occupies your intention [*sic*] and comes within your observation.[20]

In addition to personal communications which informed his family and friends of his experiences, Biddle became a transmitter of European culture to a wider audience in America with the publication in the *Port Folio* in 1806 of a letter he wrote from Florence describing that city and its inhabitants. It is not known whether he intended the letter for publication, but, though unsigned, the style and phrases are certainly those he used in his diaries and in other letters.

Biddle planned on his return home to continue to act as cultural intermediary in sending things from America to the friends he had made abroad. A list of notes at the back of his last European diary includes one to send mineral specimens to John Pinkerton, an historian, antiquary, and compiler of travels whom he had met in Paris. Another indicated his desire to aid Benjamin West's continuing interest in America: "Try to get plans of some of our public buildings for Mr. West. Pennsyl[a] bank &c." Thus his activities related to travel did not end upon his return to America. In similar fashion, the thoughts and ideas which had formed during the stay abroad continued to develop for the rest of his life.

Despite official duties required of him in Paris, Biddle had sufficient leisure and certainly a great deal of motivation to continue his ambitious program of reading. He bought guidebooks such as *Les Curiosités de Paris* and *Histoire des Antiquités de Nîmes*, and received a Greek dictionary as a gift. After a visit to a bookstore in Sicily, he complained that the Messina residents were illiterate; they had never heard of the titles he requested.

In addition to buying books, Biddle was an enthusiastic borrower and lender, especially when in one place for any length of time, as

[20] William S. Biddle to N. B., Aug. 9, 1805, Wainwright Collection, III, 17.

at Paris. He lent Lafayette a volume of speeches commemorating the death of Washington. The artist John Vanderlyn loaned Biddle books on the arts and the two read others together. John Pinkerton borrowed among other books Biddle's copy of Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia.*

He remarked that the printing was very good. I told him we printed much better in America and that the current literature in the U.S. was only two or three months later than that of England—he said he supposed so. I told [him] we printed the Bible and Junius and Blackstone's commentaries in abundance.

Always a promoter of his country and its productions, Biddle was able on this and other occasions to disseminate knowledge about literature in America as well as learn about current trends in Europe.

Although Biddle read widely in many different subjects, he had a special love for belles lettres and was familiar with many well-known authors—Johnson, Gray, Young, and Rousseau, among others. Indeed, literature could color his impressions of what he saw or the way he chose to see it. He was attracted by the idea of following Sterne's route in *A Sentimental Journey* on his own travels in France. Swiss mountain scenery reminded him of Gray's *Elegy*, and he toured Switzerland with Rousseau's novels in hand, occasionally disagreeing with Rousseau's choice of setting for his scenes. A garden in Montpellier brought to mind Young's *Night Thoughts*. Later in his trip he voiced his disagreement with Young's gloomy attitude: "Young has nothing but sighs and groans. . . . In society a man is allowed to sneer and to grumble and to growl, but never to whine." By mistake, Biddle took his innkeeper's copy of *Night Thoughts* away with him, and was in a quandary about how to get rid of it. He was tempted to throw the book into the sea, but gave it away instead.

Philosophical ideas gleaned from his reading were also examined on Biddle's journeys. The sublime and the state of nature, two concepts which were much romanticized in the literature of the period, Biddle found unappealing:

In attempting to get a better view [of a magnificent cascade of the Aar] I was almost lost among the rocks, and I saw much sublimity. Rocks

thrown at random over each other and united by rotten trees and a treacherous sod are frightful. . . . Romance is foolish. It would make us believe that every cowherd is a Handel. I have seen simple life and have a right to speak. Nature is pleasing and natural objects will always delight. But man is among the objects which improve & are pleasing almost exactly in proportion to his distance from this ideal state of nature.

He discarded any romantic notion he might have had of preferring a state of nature over civilized society: "After a long dream about the matter, I have reasoned myself into a perfect contentment with civilization. I have no idea of being an Indian. Let us take refined society as it is with its vices and its amusements. . . ." He seems to have been similarly disillusioned about his meeting with the romantic poet Coleridge in Rome; his sole comment was "il parle bien, mais il parle trop."[21]

Yet in spite of what Biddle believed to be a hardheaded approach to his travel experiences, he was deeply affected by the prevailing romanticism of his period. His diaries contain many phrases such as "How much little events affect the heart!" Rather than sharing his contemporaries' romantic attitude toward the bucolic and the state of nature, he found his inspiration for his romanticism in classical antiquity; he wrote romantic poetry about Greek ruins.

The study of foreign languages was closely related to Biddle's interest in literature, and he devoted a great deal of his time abroad to this pursuit, finding in it a substitute for companionship during his many solitary moments. So strong was his belief in the importance of becoming fluent in tongues other than his native one that he described perfecting his French by living with a French family as the beginning of the object of his voyage to Europe. It was the language he chose for the writing of several of his diaries. In some, he translated his prose into French at the back of the journal as an exercise; in others he slipped back and forth from French to English, sometimes in the same sentence. Others are entirely in French. It was the only foreign language he used in his diaries, although clearly he understood the fine points of others.

21 Coleridge was even less impressed by Biddle; his notebooks do not mention Biddle at all, although he was much intrigued by Allston. Kathleen Coburn, ed., *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York, 1961), II (1804–1808), and Donald Sultana, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Malta and Italy* (Oxford, 1969).

But it was his knowledge of modern Greek which was especially noteworthy. In a letter written from Greece to his brother, Biddle explained his conception of the differences between ancient and modern Greek. He attributed the linguistic distinctions to the differences between ancient and modern Greek civilization:

As soon as I had overcome the difficulties of pronunciation I was astonished at the similarity between the Greek of the schools & the current language of the country. The ancient Greek has only suffered what everything traditionally will suffer in its passage from a civilized nation to its barbarous posterity; the embellishments, the beauties are gradually forgotten as the refinement which created them ceases, till at last nothing remains but the substance adorned with the shapeless ornaments which a rude people loves to offer to the object of its affections. Thus the foundation of the Hellenic is perfectly preserved in the Romaic the names by which the Greeks distinguish the ancient from the modern idiom. The seeds of the two languages are the same, but unweeded by education, unpruned by care, the last has run wild and lost its purity by encroaching upon its neighbors. It will be unnecessary to specify minuter difference since we may judge of the change by learning that the modern grammar rejects the dual number, the middle voice, the two aorists, and that multitude of nice unnecessary distinctions of time and person, the natural exuberance of a subtle metaphysical people. The language of a simple nation will always partake of its simplicity and the modern Greeks without perplexing themselves with subtleties accommodate their divisions of time to their own purpose and go no farther. . . .[22]

An anecdote, often repeated by Monroe, described a visit by himself and Biddle to Cambridge, where a discussion among the learned dons of details of the differences between ancient and modern Greek was resolved by Biddle's knowledge of both. Monroe considered this an American triumph.[23]

Biddle's predilection for literature and languages combined with his interest in art and architecture when he visited European libraries. He was pleased by the fine painted ceilings in the Emperor's library at Schoenbrunn, comparing them favorably with those of a Paris library. Viewing the illuminated manuscripts there,

22 N. B. to William S. Biddle, July 25, 1806, Biddle Papers, CXXVIII, 342–343, Library of Congress.

23 *The National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans, With Biographical Sketches* (Philadelphia, 1854), III, 4.

he noted that he considered them better than large paintings or frescoes contemporary with them. The librarian rewarded Biddle's interest in ancient inscriptions with a copy of a translation of the message on a bronze tablet, a decree of the Roman senate against Bacchantian festivals. He discovered unedited material awaiting a scholar's hand in the library of Lorenzo de' Medici at Florence. His interest in American cultural life is apparent again in his comparison of the library at Ferney, Switzerland, with the Library Company of Philadelphia:

> The collection is handsome but as I went tumbling over the books, the man hinted that the books were not to be touched. I accordingly looked at some pictures, then at some curiosities, chiefly Etruscan vases which are not half so handsome as those of our day & then the library closed and we were obliged to go away. It opens every Tuesday from 1 to 3 o'clock. We used to complain that our Philadelphia library did not open every day all the 24 hours—the library at Paris opens a week from 11 to 2. That of Berne twice a week for a couple I believe of hours, nor do I believe there is a single collection where the forms are as liberal as at Philadelphia.

Biddle's interest in artistic matters may have existed before his setting off for Europe, but it certainly flourished during his stay there. He read works on the arts, borrowing Reynolds' *Discourses* from Vanderlyn and reading and discussing Henry Fuseli with the American artist. Always interested in painting collections, Biddle's opportunity to visit Italy, view art collections, architecture and sculpture, and converse there with Vanderlyn and Washington Allston sharpened his eye considerably, so that when he revisited the Louvre after his Italian sojourn he felt much better able to appreciate its treasures. Biddle's contact with Vanderlyn undoubtedly taught him a great deal about art. He wrote of his artist friend

> I hope and believe that he will one day be really an ornament to his country. If ever any man was inspired it is V^{n}, his talent for painting is singular and great, it is his only study. His mind is on every other subject uncommonly informed, but on his darling study he is all instruction.

In England, he had a long discussion with Benjamin West on the current state of the arts and the relative importance of the national schools of art. On another occasion he visited a private collection

with West.[24] Although no purchases of works of art by Biddle for himself are known, he did sit for his portrait in Paris.

His artistic judgment was tested by a request in July 1805 from Charles Willson Peale, Joseph Hopkinson, and William Meredith, representing the newly formed Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The three explained that New York's American Academy of Fine Arts had recently received casts of famous statuary and that the Pennsylvania Academy wished to acquire a similar collection. A list of the desired statues was enclosed, along with authorization for the expenditure of 3,300 francs for casts and shipping expenses. Biddle replied immediately, expressing his eagerness to fulfill the duties entrusted to him, and wrote again upon the completion and dispatching of the casts. His comments on the statues reveal that he had studied them and followed the advice of the renowned French sculptor Houdon. Biddle ordered official models taken from the original statues rather than lower-priced reproductions. Going beyond the considerable effort asked of him, he sent a list of the museums the statues came from, and the circumstances of time and place of discovery of each. He also ordered on his own initiative a full-length statue intended for students. "This, altho' modern is so highly esteemed, & seems so well calculated for the purposes of an Academy that it has been added with a conviction that it would be acceptable."[25]

The members of the Academy were pleased to receive the casts and displayed them prominently at the formal opening of the Academy's new building.[26] Despite the importance of his service to the fledgling institution, Biddle made little of it in his diary, saying only "I arranged my plasters for the museum."

24 See Wainwright for the complete text of Biddle's conversations with West.

25 N. B. to the Academy committee, Nov. 20, 1805, Archives of American Art, papers of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

26 "You may see by the newspaper that the 'Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts is now opened in this City.' We have built a handsome House in Chesnut between Tenth & Eleventh Streets, & in a very elegant circular room, exhibit to all who pay a quarter of a Dollar, your much admired Casts. The room is fifty feet in Diameter, is handsomely plaistered & finished, the floor is covered with green cloth, and the casts mounted upon neat pedestals have a very good effect. They arrived in excellent preservation, except the Hermaphrodite which was broken." William S. Biddle to N. B., May 13, 1807, Biddle Papers, CXXVIII, 403, Library of Congress.

Biddle's early education had concentrated far more heavily on literature than on natural philosophy or scientific subjects. But upon arriving in Europe his curiosity about scientific phenomena grew, and his diaries contain many comments about them. In an introspective passage written in Nice, he reflected that since coming to France, he had been more interested in science than in literature. The collections of minerals at Vienna, Paris, and Florence impressed him particularly, as did the animal and bird specimens kept with them. He discussed with scholars the problems of reconciling fossils found at Versailles with the Biblical account of the Flood, and Fouquet's theory that earthquakes caused changes of climate.

He spoke at length with Dr. Franz Gall, founder of phrenology, who, he wrote, "has nothing of the Quack about him." Like many intelligent men in the early nineteenth century, he was much intrigued by Gall's studies, and attracted by the way they fitted complex phenomena into a comprehensive scheme. "When my head is occupied about any single object I am wholly absorbed by it and attend to nothing else. Thus at present I think only of Dr. Gall and his new system." Biddle devoted several pages to Gall's pronouncements differentiating people's characters according to the bumps on their heads. Gall could account thus for virtually all character traits, including artistic ability. Fine landscape painting in Holland, for instance, was due to the developed "local sense" of the Dutch skull. But if the artist's "organ of murder" was strong, he would be naturally inclined to paint battle scenes.

In addition to speaking with scientifically inclined individuals, Biddle observed two group efforts, the French Institute and the English Royal Society. "The Royal Society has more dignity and gravity, but the Institute infinitely more interest, for on every communication there is a discussion sometimes animated and eloquent of the subject, nor are the sittings so short—with regard to their comparative merits as a scientific body I should suppose the scale would be in favor of France." Biddle further compared the individual initiative of the Royal Society with government patronage of French scientific inquiry, concluding that such support could be beneficial if it did not dictate ends and methods of research.

One interest of scientists in the nineteenth century was that of improving agricultural production, and Nicholas Biddle, though an

urban dweller for his first eighteen years, took note throughout his travels of soil conditions, crops, and the raising of animals. During his first few weeks in France, before reaching Paris, he noted details of farm equipment, commented on different breeds of horses, and observed the making of wine and cider. He delighted in the abundance of grapes growing beside the road he traveled:

> It was really pleasing to an American who sees grapes so rarely in his own country, to behold on each side of the road, grapes hanging in clusters on the vines, with no fence or the slightest barrier to prohibit the passenger from plucking them. This morning I jumped out of the carriage, & at the distance of 10 feet plucked several bunches of the most delightful grapes.

Biddle described the planting of crops in France and Naples, and noted more than once that the land in Greece, though mountainous, was fertile and well tilled. Ancient Elis, in Greece, famed for the richness of its soil, retained that benefit in the modern day, having an "air of abundance" and producing much grain. In England, the last country he visited, he remarked on the hedges as preferable to American fences, and expressed his regret at the effects of enclosure, which he considered "a very bad system." Although he does not seem to have actually visited Poland, he was curious about the suitability of its land for cultivation. On two occasions in Paris, Biddle and Lafayette discussed the merits of merino sheep, Lafayette preferring them because they produced four times the wool of other breeds but cost only twice as much.

Law and government were other subjects which consistently interested Biddle, not surprisingly, since he was trained as a lawyer and considered law the "only avenue to public life" in America. Again, always noting comparisons with America, he inquired about legal matters in every country he visited. In France, he observed a difference in French law from that to which he was accustomed: the family of the accused could plead for him. En route from Lille to Marseilles, a gentleman traveling in the same coach with Biddle explained how he thought the new civil code in France would abridge the people's rights and privileges. In Switzerland, he set down a description of the Swiss government, and was pleased to find that swiftness was possible in Swiss courts. Recognizing how slowly the legal process could move in America, he joked of the

courts in Turkish-ruled Greece, "with us justice may be bought sometimes, but never bought soon. Here it may [be] bought immediately. I should really prefer Turkish to Pennsylvania courts."

In Vienna he reflected on American politics and government.

> The politics of America are all comprized in the expressive word forbearance. With the quarrels of Europe we have nothing to do but smile at and profit by them. . . . In America the government will always be pushed forward to battle by the people; in Europe the people are always led on by the government. America has no friends in Europe . . . her government is the despair of tyrants.

He compared the contemporary situation in Austria with that in America at the end of the Revolution, principally with regard to lack of confidence in the government. The new French law in Venice broke the former custom of entail, with the result that property became cheap, "one of their largest palaces not costing so much as a common three-story house in New York." He bought a book on German trade rights in Nuremburg.

In Greece he penned a lengthy passage in his diary on Zantean law, his judgment being that the laws seemed liberal still but were declining. Irrationality in law was frequent in Europe, he found; Greek church law had "the same rule of hotch pot" as English law. Perhaps because of national defensiveness, Biddle seemed determined not to find anything positive about the English legal system. He was disappointed with the physical setting for the English process.

> The first appearance of the Courts of Law in London, like that of almost all their public buildings is mean and contemptible. The Court of King's bench and Common Pleas are held in two little rooms opening upon Westminster hall which are more like two garrets, than courts of justice—little inconvenient and ugly.

He maintained that "the meanest state legislatures in America" were better accommodated.

Continuing to voice his disappointment with English law in general and English oratory in particular, Biddle visited the House of Commons during an especially acrimonious debate, in which he

characterized the participants as "not much superior to the mob of Covent Garden."

> It is true that I have seen Parliament at a moment of peculiar bitterness and animosity, but generally I am persuaded that there is much less personality in America than here. . . . The general run of them spoke very poorly, no eloquence very little reasoning, & some bad grammar. . . . There is infinitely more legislative eloquence in America than in England. It cannot be otherwise. From their infancy our children are taught to speak in debating societies, then in the state legislatures. The congress is a collection of men who have distinguished themselves in some way principally by their eloquence. A Member of Parliament is distinguished by his money if a county representative, by his servility, if a borough member.

Polished public speaking was a matter of crucial importance to Biddle, for he believed that his own talents were best directed toward becoming an orator. His speeches to the Cliosophic Society at Princeton and his training in law and literature were a sound preparation in this area, and he continued his reading of classical orations abroad. His brother William wrote him to encourage his study in all disciplines, with special emphasis on ancient Greek and Roman authors, particularly Cicero, Quintilian, and Tacitus, as the best training for "those who are desirous to cultivate a style of writing and speaking at once Manly Persuasive and Elegant."[27] His reading of classical authors no doubt suggested his note to himself at the beginning of one of his diaries to "write Annals of Pennsyl[a]—one day—Tacitus & Machiavelli for guides."

Biddle's interest in classical authors naturally extended to a desire to visit the countries where great deeds had been done and recorded, where great orations had been declaimed and written down. He prepared for his journey by questioning travelers about Italy and Greece, and once on the way was so excited at the prospect that he made only a half-hearted attempt to record the sights he saw in Bordeaux: "I saw nothing. I am going to see Roman palaces." Once the initial thrill of being in Rome abated, however, he found that he felt a "mingled sense of melancholy" at the contrast of noble ruins with the swarms of beggars and hordes of obnoxious tourists. He turned his attention toward Greece, a country little visited; he may have been the first American tourist

[27] William S. Biddle to N. B., Aug. 9, 1805, Wainwright Collection, III, 17.

to go there. Biddle had prepared himself thoroughly to retrace the sites of ancient history, and looked forward to learning from foreign customs:

> For myself falling as it were suddenly among a people so new, a world of foreign ideas presented themselves to my observation, Nor has it been the least of my gratifications to have so brilliant a light reflected on all my ancient reading. To have been on the spot elucidates the text of history more than all the criticisms of the most ingenious commentators.[28]

Of course he continued to read and study in both Italy and Greece, and sought the company of other gifted men—Allston, Vanderlyn, and Coleridge in Rome, and Fauvel, a noted antiquary and historian, in Athens.

As with his travels in the rest of Europe, Biddle's reading affected his interest in what he saw. He found sites fascinating if they had figured in ancient history, but he constantly noticed a dichotomy between ancient grandeur and modern decay, and a parallel between the crumbled buildings and the crushed spirit of the Greek people. Although Roman marble could decompose, Biddle found the Roman spirit vigorous. But in Greece, he believed, destruction was complete, the Greek soul dominated by Turkish oppression. Biddle's romantic nature, not aroused by the bucolic or natural phenomena, was totally engaged by the plight of modern Greece. As an American, he felt he was carrying the "veneration and the sympathy of the new and only republic to the ruins of the old." Between the fulfillment of seeing the sites of which he had read and the novelty of observing and conversing with Greeks and Turks, he considered that he had learned more in that two-month period than in any other of his life.

Biddle's interest in classical architecture was stimulated by these visits; the very sight of ruins could make him forget the fatigue of travel. Ancient architecture and sculpture showed a "wonderful genius," he maintained, and he eagerly inspected classical buildings whether in good repair or in ruins. The recent removal of Parthenon marbles by Lord Elgin shocked him to the core; calling him the "Scotch vandal," Biddle compared the destruction unfavorably to

[28] N. B. to William S. Biddle, July 25, 1806, Biddle Papers, CXXVIII, 346, Library of Congress.

deliberate pillage: "Erostratus burned for glory, Elgin robbed for gold." He learned a great deal about ancient Greece from the antiquary Fauvel, and filled the back of his second Greek notebook with nearly forty closely written pages on Athens, including sketches and notes on architecture.

The amphitheatre at Nîmes fulfilled his expectations and he copied a detailed description of it from his Nîmes guidebook. His use of the vocabulary of classical architecture shows his growing familiarity with those terms, aided by the advantage of visiting monuments to lend a vividness which reading alone could never provide. The Maison Carrée reminded him of Latrobe's Bank of Pennsylvania: "It is truly a work as beautiful as it is curious and well preserved. The entry and facade resemble very much the Bank in Philadelphia which resembles it almost exactly except that the columns of that building are enclosed in the walls and that the cornices are infinitely beautiful."

Comparisons of Europe with America were never far from Biddle's thoughts; his native land was always at the back of his mind. An eagle on a tomb was "like the arms of the United States." Austrian coffeehouses were "like our social clubs"; wagons bringing produce to Trieste were "much like our German waggons in Pennsylvania." Albanians were "like our Indians"; the bridge at Nantes was like that over the Schuylkill.

Almost invariably the comparison favored America. Many European rivers reminded him of those which flowed past Philadelphia.

> I have not exactly a good idea of the size of our Schuylkill, but the Danube is about I think as wide again. But our Delaware would disdain this creek of a Danube for such it really is in comparison with her. . . . I have never seen any river which in point of picturesque scenery, and the union of all the beauties of nature I will not say equalled, but even approached the Schuylkill. . . . I should be ashamed if the idea of this river's running by the house where I was born entered into my opinion. But it is an unquestionable fact that nature is much more beautiful in America than in Europe. There every production of nature is grand. Alston and Vanderlyn laugh at the beautiful scenery, the wonders of nature in Europe.

Likewise, a confederation of towns in Greece could not be compared with "the greatness and extent of our country," and the Bordeaux hospital for the insane was "not comparable to ours."

Biddle found the nearest thing to Philadelphia in Switzerland. Ferney, he and Vanderlyn agreed, was like an American town—pretty, clean, and new. The resemblance was more than physical; Philadelphia, like Swiss towns, was best known for its cultivated middle class.

Switzerland above all Geneva has the most comfortable society I have seen. If I am not biassed by affection, the growing society, the coming people of Pa will be as good as any in this part of the world. They resemble much Geneva. Tolerable fortunes easy good manners, & particularly, cultivated minds. Pa is infinitely superior to the rest of Ama in that respect. They have got some faults which partiality itself cannot conceal: but in every picture there must be light & shade.

As an American, Biddle found himself something of a curiosity. Europeans inquiring about America often showed total or near-total ignorance of its inhabitants and institutions. The Swiss were full of questions: whether there were mountains and islands, whether coffee grew there, its population, and so on. Biddle found many misconceptions. A shopkeeper in Syracuse was under the impression that one of the conditions of America's being granted independence was the promise to England not to build warships; "such are the strange ideas which the people of this country entertain of America." Beliefs could even be ludicrous. A Swiss was surprised to hear that Biddle was an American "since Americans have flat noses."

Washington was often the only name familiar to Europeans. The director of a convent of Armenians, reported Biddle, knew something about America, for he had heard of Washington. Some were actually acquainted with Americans who had gone abroad. An old Greek bishop inquired after a Mr. Smith "of Carolina, who seems to have pleased him wonderfully." A German physician asked about Dr. Rush of Philadelphia, and Dr. Gall, the phrenologist, endeared himself to Biddle by being the first European to speak to him of the prison at Philadelphia.[29]

Gall seemed pleased at the prospect of having his reputation extended to the United States as a result of his conversation with

[29] The system of solitary confinement was an innovation in penal reform at the Walnut Street Jail; Biddle had probably expected more Europeans to mention it. See George Tatum, *Penn's Great Town* (Philadelphia, 1961), 38.

Biddle. The young American was also able to aid Europeans in gaining knowledge about his country by advising them on how to send letters to America, and by acting as an informal spokesman for his nation on many occasions.

Being abroad gave Biddle an opportunity to put American customs and practices in a broader perspective. Concessions that America could be improved in any respect were rare in his journals, but they did occur. He acknowledged that the elegance of Greek and Turkish clothing made American dress look mean by comparison, and was healthier than what was worn in the United States. On another occasion he declared that

> No man admires his country more than I do. The only fault I can discover in its institutions is that remnant of Puritanism which renders our Sundays so sad and almost useless. It is peculiar to England and America. . . . If I were the great Being I should like to see my creatures gay and happy. . . . I hope one day to see this rubbed off.

He was able to discover a parallel to the contemptuous American attitude toward groups with ethnic backgrounds different from their own in observing the Sicilians: "They laugh at the Neapolitans as we do the Irish, and with much more reason. The Neapolitans being dull in comparison with them they make all their Buffoons and Polchinella's come from Naples."

One of the chief differences between the American republic and Europe, of course, was the question of distinction of rank. Biddle thought that Americans valued the European system too highly, and could be too easily dazzled by the appurtenances of nobility. For this reason, he wrote, it was a mistake to send Americans abroad for the first time in an important public capacity: they had not had a chance to put the European system of status in perspective before being influenced by it. Sufficient exposure to royal trappings, Biddle believed, would lessen American envy of them. "It is very well for a republican to visit the residence of royalty. We came nearer to [Schoenbrunn], and of course feel less reverence for it." He joked about purchasing a title; "I for instance instead of Mr. Biddle could get myself called Mr. of Biddle and would in this way be a much better man for a very little money." The only proper criterion for distinction, he believed, should be talent and merit.

Many impressions of national character appear in Biddle's journals, beginning when he first sighted France from his ship with the observation that its many windmills were symbolic of French levity. The French were strong in mythology, weak in geography; a German did one a favor less graciously than a Frenchman did a wrong. Austrians were "a gayer nation than we're willing to imagine." The Dutch fitted their industrious stereotype.

But Biddle's travels in Europe, and his conversations with people he met, also allowed him to form balanced, intelligent, thoughtful impressions of European society. Rather than relying on one person's opinion, or a single observation of his own, he was able to gather many points of view. In assessing the state of France and the effects of the Revolution, he was exposed early to the rosy view of Lafayette, who assured him that the condition of the French was more comfortable since the Revolution. However, Biddle had noted a lack of gaiety and enthusiasm for Napoleon's coronation. The people seemed indifferent to public events and sought privacy. The devastation wrought by the Revolution was brought home to him when he visited the ruins of a chateau with its former owner. Biddle's manservant offered his opinion that the French had not gained by the overthrow of the Bourbons. Later, on his journey to Rome through the south of France, Biddle observed that those who had favored the Revolution were more tolerant in religious matters, and he expressed the hope that the second generation would be even more so.

In Europe he experienced what he considered to be his first real exposure to intolerance and despotism. Turkish soldiers humiliated Greek citizens mercilessly. The Turkish governor of Livadia, impatient at a delay in payment of funds, cut off some Greek heads. A less serious incident, though one which seemed to affect Biddle more deeply, involved religious discrimination against a Jew, who was charged double the usual amount for passage on a ferryboat. Biddle protested to the "descendant of Charron," but the Jew paid. "I never knew what intolerance was til now," Biddle concluded.

Travel provided opportunities for the gaining of self-knowledge in practical matters as well. Biddle's allowance from his parents was severely limited, and at times ran very low. At one point in his travels, he refrained from eating for fear that if he were overcharged he would be unable to pay. "After all money is a great comfort in

this world," he reflected. He also was able to laugh at his own gullibility when, about to purchase what he believed to be a remarkably well-preserved antique coin, his servant pointed out that it was a modern Russian coin.

Perhaps most important for Biddle were the opportunities for moments of reflection provided during his travels. He was able to consider his strengths and capabilities, his hopes and ambitions. Because of his isolation from friends and family for a length of time unusual for Americans in Europe, he recorded these thoughts in his diaries. His twentieth birthday, January 8, 1806, brought on the first of these moments of introspection. Believing he was of delicate constitution and would not live to be an old man, he was filled with ambitions to be an orator and to see, study, and understand everything. Perhaps as a heritage of his Princeton education, he wished to distinguish himself among his peers by his talents and learning. He echoed the same thought later when he wrote that he had decided what his genius fitted him for—"to lead men"—but that he knew that he still had a great deal to learn. In August 1806, he noted two strong strains in his character, great ambition and "a contempt for the ideas and thoughts of others." He decided to try to live by the rule "always to act as you would wish you had acted, when some years after you are relating the fact to your friends." A few months later, after considering the possibilities of Dr. Gall's phrenological system, he wondered, "Why are we limited? I love to wander over every field of knowledge." Reflecting on the strict economy he had to observe in his travels, he remarked, "I have always gone beyond my resources, carried away by that ardent curiosity which has led me so far."

Biddle tried to sum up his conclusions about his benefits from travel:

> Henceforward all my steps will be towards home. I have now gratified the ardent wishes the fervid curiosity to see other men & to mingle with the world which might once have rendered my life unhappy. I begin to feel that it will soon be my turn to cease to be only an observer; that the age at which society has its claims upon me will shortly arrive; and that I have many duties unperformed to my country & my family. I am not insensible how far I have wandered beyond our original expectations nor

how widely I am departed from those [loved ones]. . . . You are far above the idle expectations of improvement from travelling. Yet I think no traveller can look upon the general lot of mankind without being contented with his own, no man can examine the world, without confining and increasing his affections to the early objects of them; no American can compare the institutions of his country with those of Europe without being grateful for its happiness without exulting in its destiny without adoring its freedom. . . .[30]

Nicholas Biddle returned to America, greatly pleased with his foreign sojourn but eager to be home again. Although he was never again to visit Europe, the influence of his Continental travel was to remain with him throughout his life. The person he became owed a great deal to his three years abroad, and the concerns which had interested him there continued to develop in America as opportunities arose for expression of his talents.

Some of the friendships he had made were maintained; for instance, he became Lafayette's banker.[31] Far more important for his career was his work with Monroe in London. Biddle assiduously cultivated that connection, asking Monroe's advice about the best course to follow to gain distinction in public life.[32] Biddle's reward came in 1819 when Monroe appointed him a director of the Bank of the United States. His ability to do well at that post, and soon afterwards as president of the Bank, stemmed in part from his experience with financial affairs while transacting the business of the American Ministry in Paris. His legal career also was benefitted, as on his return home he became the representative of the American consuls in Paris and London.

His interest in being an orator, begun in college and evolved abroad, was given expression not only at the bar but especially after he became a state legislator in 1810. Two of his earliest speeches before the legislature in Lancaster, on the importance of free public

30 N. B. to William S. Biddle, July 25, 1806, Biddle Papers, CXXVIII, 346–347, Library of Congress.

31 Lafayette asked about the best means of investing $120,000. Interestingly enough, Biddle recommended investment not in bank stock, which might fluctuate, but in the stock of the United States. N. B., note of Jan. 15, 1825, Biddle Manuscripts at Andalusia.

32 N. B. to James Monroe, July 6, 1807, Reginald C. McCrane, ed., *The Correspondence of Nicholas Biddle dealing with National Affairs, 1807–1844* (New York, 1919), 3–4.

education for those unable to pay, and on the necessity of maintaining a national bank, established his reputation for knowledge of the nuances of important public issues. In later life Biddle made a number of addresses which attracted wide attention and gained him recognition as a public speaker.

Like many other prominent Philadelphians, Biddle was a member of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture. During his travels, he had noted European methods of cultivating the soil, and after his marriage in 1811 he became a gentleman farmer. His country property, Andalusia, purchased by him from his father-in-law's estate, was the scene of his agricultural experiments, notably his cultivation of grapes; his lecture before the Agricultural Society in 1822 reported on some of his successes. He cultivated his hundred-acre farm intensively, using irrigation, crop rotation, and both artificial and animal fertilizers. Recalling Lafayette's advice about merino sheep, he chose animals of high quality. Biddle believed that the future of farming depended upon concentrating the farmer's efforts on small farms to obtain greater production per acre, and in his speech he urged others to adopt his methods.[33]

Biddle's address on the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone of Girard College in 1833 summarizes his mature attitudes about architecture, which he had begun to consider while viewing the remains of classical buildings in southern France, Italy, and Greece. He considered public structures a reflection of the people who erected them. Coarse people produced crude buildings; overly wealthy and capricious men built ones with too much ornamentation.

> it is only when sustained by the public spirit of a community at once enlightened and generous, that architecture attains its highest glory—a refined simplicity. Of that perfection it is proposed that this structure shall present a model, the equal at least of similar works in any other country, and not unworthy of the best days of antiquity—a structure which will at once gratify the honourable pride of every citizen of the United States, and form the best study for all the branches of industry connected with architecture.[34]

[33] *Address Delivered Before The Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture . . . By Nicholas Biddle, Esq.* (Philadelphia, 1822).

[34] *Proceedings on Laying the Cornerstone of the Girard College for Orphans, together with the Address on that Occasion by Nicholas Biddle*, 20.

His belief that architecture based on classical models was the best style for America was so strong that he insisted that the Girard College architect, Thomas U. Walter, revise his plans toward that end. Biddle also remodeled Andalusia to incorporate a classical portico.[35] He may have been among those who wished for a classical design for the Second Bank of the United States, though he had no formal connection with the Bank at the time of the selection of William Strickland's plan in 1818. It was appropriate that Biddle's entire banking career should have taken place in a model of the Parthenon.

Biddle's editorship of the *Port Folio*, from January 1812 through January 1814, afforded him his best opportunity for the expression of his fondness for the arts, language, literature, travel and science, in all of which he had been so greatly stimulated by his years abroad. In the first issue under his editorship—a brief co-editorship with Dennie, who died early in January 1812—he announced a new permanent section on the fine arts, presented in chronological order, to "furnish to those who have not enjoyed the advantage of examining the originals, correct notions of some of the most prominent characteristics of the respective artists."[36] Besides these articles, he proposed in July 1812 a regular section to report on the arts in Europe, including recent publications, news from academies, and reviews of exhibits.[37] Engravings of modern French paintings became a feature of the magazine.

But the *Port Folio* was essentially an American product, and Biddle, who had believed since his Princeton days in America as a new center for literature, encouraged native talent. He urged authors and artists to study nature in America. Echoing his comparisons

35 Govan, 406; Nicholas B. Wainwright, *Andalusia, Countryseat of the Craig Family and of Nicholas Biddle and His Descendants* (Philadelphia, 1976), 24. Sarah Lytle is preparing a University of Delaware master's thesis dealing with the remodeling of Andalusia.

36 *Port Folio*, Jan. 7, 1812, p. 134.

37 *Ibid.*, July 1812, p. 36. John Hall hinted that there might indeed be too much material on artistic matters in the *Port Folio* to suit some tastes: "A very sensible young lady whom you know very well and whom we all love very much, exclaimed to me, lately, when we were talking about the P.F. "Oh hang the painters."—this by way of hint that some folks think this gentry occupy too much of your canvas. For my own part though I wish old *scratch* (their father) had them all, yet I am quite willing that all tastes should be gratified." Wainwright Collection, III, 21.

while abroad of European and American scenery, he wrote: "There is not a more picturesque or poetic region than our own—Arcadia itself is not more beautiful nor yet more sonorous than Pennsylvania; and the Thames, or even the Arno, are insipid brooks, by the side of the Hudson or the Schuylkill."[38] Biddle's literary reputation continued to flourish after he left the *Port Folio*. Years later, for example, Edgar Allan Poe solicited an article from him for the opening issue of a magazine Poe desired to publish.[39]

Education concerned Biddle increasingly. While abroad he had seen something of European educational methods. Upon his return, as previously mentioned, he spoke in the Pennsylvania legislature in favor of free education for the poor. As chairman of the board of Girard College in 1833, he tried to collect "the best English and French works on general education," and recommended that an officer be hired to go to Europe and study the educational systems there.[40]

If Biddle's European journey had whetted his appetite for travel, a great opportunity arose for him to combine this interest with his love for America. The Lewis and Clark journals needed an editor, and Clark invited Biddle to perform the task. He traveled to Virginia, keeping a diary of his journey in French for language practice. During the few weeks he spent with Clark, he read all the journals and questioned Clark extensively. Upon returning to Philadelphia, he issued a prospectus which included a statement of his evaluation of the importance of the mission of Lewis and Clark:

> Of this enterprize, planned by our own government, and achieved through great dangers by our own countrymen, little need be said to attract the attention of the American people. The sources of the Columbia and Missouri rivers, which had eluded all former research, have been fully explored, and a line of intercourse—the future path of civilization—connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Vast regions are now opened, to reward the spirit of commercial adventure, and to receive, hereafter, the overflowing tide of our own population. Entire nations, varying at once

38 *Port Folio*, Jan. 7, 1812, p. 196.

39 Edgar Allan Poe to N. B., Jan. 6, 1841, Biddle Manuscripts at Andalusia.

40 Albert Gallatin to N. B., Apr. 11, 1833: "... your intended collection of the best English and French works on general Education, which I presume to be the object of the Girard's institution." Biddle Manuscripts at Andalusia.

from ourselves and from each other, have been revealed to the curiosity of the civilized world, while science is enriched by new and valuable acquisitions.[41]

Nicholas Biddle never wrote the Annals of Pennsylvania; in editing the Lewis and Clark journals he performed a task of greater significance for the whole country.[42]

Biddle had considered the importance of travel while actually engaged in it, but even then he was cognizant that it could become more important in retrospect.

> A very judicious man once told me that he thought it more agreeable to have travelled than to travel. Perhaps he had reason on his side. The consciousness of having seen a remarkable thing, the recollection of the surrounding circumstances, the contentment inspired by your having sought after it & returned safe, the seducing, the natural tho' weak pride of saying "I have seen it": perhaps the superiority which actual observation gives: all these communicate a pleasure which at the moment [of travel] we do not often feel. Our attitude is then distracted, we are incommoded by spectators, we are rarely free to think as we afterwards do.

During his Princeton days Biddle had written of the moral benefits to be derived from travel, and it was appropriate that he should return to Princeton more than thirty years later to draw upon his experience to illustrate the two outstanding memories from his Continental excursion: the "melancholy pictures of the decay of nations" suggested by the ruin at Delphos, and the rise of Napoleon, who had been the "great master-spirit of our age" but who had died dethroned and exiled. "That is the great moral lesson of our age."[43]

Biddle remained a link in a chain of friendship uniting America with Europe. He welcomed foreign travelers to his home. He was the recipient of letters of recommendation for visitors to the United

41 Donald Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, With Related Documents, 1783–1854* (Urbana, Ill., 1962), 546–548.

42 Jackson traces Biddle's involvement in the editorship and shows his care with detail. See especially letters 330, 331, 337, 342, 351, and 366.

43 *An Address Delivered before the Alumni Association of Nassau Hall on the Day of the Annual Commencement of the College, September 30, 1835. By Nicholas Biddle* (Philadelphia, 1836), 8.

States, and he wrote many to friends abroad, referring his American acquaintances to them. When his son went to Europe, he pondered what to tell him. Accustomed from his own days of travel to writing his thoughts and notes to himself in a journal, he did so on this occasion also: "Son going to travel in Europe. Go—from father's and mother's arms—go—tis hard yet feel that you should see the world &c—Hearken to the instructions of one who in his route wandered &c—Polonius' advice—visit England—land of fathers &c. . . ."[44]

For many years, Biddle wished to return to Europe. In 1815 he promised his wife that he would take her abroad, and tried to obtain a diplomatic post.[45] His career with the Bank intervened and pushed the possibility of foreign travel far into the background. But upon his retirement he remembered the old dream. His letter in 1840 to Daniel Webster, discreetly inquiring about the chances of his receiving the Vienna Ministry, presents his statement of desire and qualifications. He described the post as

> a project in which I have for some time indulged—but which I have never mentioned to any one even of my own family. . . . It is a great wish of my family to travel in Europe, and I should incline to indulge it. But as you know travelling in Europe to a mere private gentleman is a dull business. If a man had a high public station & a higher public fame, as you had, he gets along well, but a private gentleman delivering cold letters of introduction & making his way into what is called society has a task extremely repugnant to his pride. I am too old for that & I am satisfied that the only way of being comfortable is to have some public character which at once settles your rank & places you above the necessity of groping your way. Of these stations some are troublesome from the business to be done & from the crowds of countrymen with whom one comes into contact: others give less rank but less labor. Now my object being to travel I would not be willing to remain in London or Paris or Petersburgh—but I would prefer some position within striking distance of all the places on the continent, which would form the circle of travel and on the whole the place which seems best adapted for that purpose is Vienna. In regard to fitness, I have nothing to say—I began my career as Secretary in Paris & afterwards in London. I was to have been sent by Mr. Madison as Minister to London at the close of the last war, & was not sent because I was not

[44] Gray notebook in library at Andalusia.
[45] Govan, 48.

a member of Congress. . . . I have never made any suggestion about it, I did not know even of the design till some years afterwards, & as I should be "able" & able from my own private means to do all the external honors of a legation & have already been at Vienna. I think I might be not a very bad successor to the recent incumbent. . . . I wish to travel & deeming some public character essential I have thought of one which might enable me to do some good, & to represent not unworthily the new administration & the new Secretary for foreign affairs. . . .[46]

That he was not sent was undoubtedly a loss to diplomacy. Nicholas Biddle's travels, in extent and duration, were highly unusual if not unique for an American in the early nineteenth century. If he could have gone to Europe again with the added background of his experience in the intervening years, he might have been able to carry his dedication to public service with distinction into this new sphere.

Winterthur Museum ANNE FELICITY WOODHOUSE

[46] N. B. to Daniel Webster, Dec. 13, 1840, McGrane, 337–339.