

Book Reviews

The Diary of Calvin Fletcher. Volume V, 1853-1856: Including Letters to and from Calvin Fletcher. Edited by Gayle Thornbrough, Dorothy L. Riker, and Paula Corpuz. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1977. Pp. xl, 662. Illustrations, notes, index. \$10.00.)

Viewed from the last quarter of the twentieth century, the life of Calvin Fletcher as conveyed through his diary seems far removed from conditions in Indiana in the 1970s. Travel in the midnineteenth century, for example, lacked the speed and comfort to which Hoosiers today are accustomed. In February, 1853, it took Fletcher from noon on Tuesday until noon on Thursday to make the trip by railroad from Cincinnati to Indianapolis (p. 18). Nevertheless, Fletcher traveled more than usual during the years from 1853 to 1856, and his accounts speak of "cold disagreeable" railroad travel (p. 358) and "dark & gloomy" lodgings with "No furniture or conveniences" (p. 450). The distance between now and then appears greatest where advances in technology intervene. A generation reared on the marvels of modern medicine must be shocked at how little beyond prescribing camphor, mustard plasters, and morphine the doctors of the time could do for Sarah Fletcher in her final illness. Considering the great number of material changes which have occurred between 1856 and 1978, the wonder is how much of Fletcher's life appears "modern" in other respects.

Fletcher's relations with his sons, for example, illustrate the contemporary quality of the diary. Like many fathers today he wanted his children to succeed and to profit from his experience and wisdom. Fletcher found it particularly hard to communicate with his son Billy who quit school, chose questionable friends, disgraced himself and his family, and left home without a word to his father. More than one father today can sympathize with Fletcher's anguish in desiring to deal rightly with his son. "At first thought I would punish him & start him immediately on his trip. This on reviewing my relation, & my duties I decided wrong that I had [as] a father to subject him & send him into the world right—not a bad rebellious boy but an upright young man. I have prayed God to give me wisdom to instruct & rescue him from the evil views he has" (p. 391).

Nor did Fletcher escape the anxieties of living that current generations tend to consider peculiarly modern. Though a success by conventional standards, he was haunted by gloom and

depression. In early 1853 he wrote: "I often feel gloomy yet I should not" (p. 8). The death of his wife increased his depression and may explain the relative haste he displayed in selecting a new wife in the face of his children's objections. His melancholy may have arisen, in part, from dissatisfaction with the direction his life had taken. Increasingly he confided to his diary a longing to withdraw from his many responsibilities and retire to his farm. In explaining his yearning for the pastoral life he declared: "I never had doubts but that what was dependent on physical force I could do but what depends on the mental exertion I have doubted" (p. 206). This is a strange admission from one whose career had centered on law, business, and banking, but one perhaps understandable to his twentieth century counterparts.

The value of the diary for scholars lies not so much in how well it relates to twentieth century experience as in what it reveals about midnineteenth century conditions in Indianapolis and in the state. The diary continues the informative business and political commentary of the earlier volumes. Students of business history will benefit from Fletcher's observations about free banks and the Bank of the State of Indiana. The former he viewed with apprehension, the latter with suspicion. They will also benefit from his intimate knowledge of railroad development in the state, particularly the Indianapolis and Bellefontaine Railroad, which he served for a time as president. Political scholars of the period will view with interest his characterizations of public men and his charges of corruption in politics.

Similarly the diary continues to reflect Fletcher's interest in education and reform. Of all his activities Fletcher seemed to find the most satisfaction from his service as trustee of the Indianapolis common schools, which position he assumed in January, 1853. His duties included hiring and dismissing teachers, school discipline, visitations, arranging examinations, inspecting and making recommendations on school facilities, and reporting quarterly to the Indianapolis City Council, and very little escaped his attention. From these experiences he confided to his diary his candid impressions of education in Indianapolis. Fletcher's considerable interest in reform centered on the temperance and Free Soil movements. Temperance suffered a near fatal blow in Indiana when the state supreme court in 1855 declared a Maine type prohibition law unconstitutional. Following this, Fletcher directed his talents to the Free Soil movement on which he pinned his hope for a "better future" (p. 595).

From the beginning of the publication of this multivolume diary the editors sought a "median ground between pedantic fidelity and readability" (vol. I, p. xxv). Each volume has lived up to that standard. Such editorial aids as a survey introduction, a chronology of events, and an extensive index all contribute to the diary's readability. Careful editing of the manuscript and wide ranging notes drawn from both primary and secondary sources provide the scholar with the fidelity needed for research. The diary, in sum, provides a readable and reliable source of valuable information for both the general reader and the scholar.

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Religious Newspapers in the Old Northwest to 1861: A History, Bibliography, and Record of Opinion. By Wesley Norton. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977. Pp. xi, 196. Notes, bibliography of religious newspapers, index. \$12.50.)

If all the religious newspapers published in the Old Northwest to 1861 could be put in a pile, they would make a very large mound indeed. All who read this book will know that Wesley Norton has worked in the scattered remnants of that mound with diligence and unusual comprehension. He offers the reader a vicarious trip through many an acid flecked file.

His "Bibliography of Religious Newspapers with Library Holdings" (p. 159-78) gives an indication of the bulk of the research material. There are 176 entries in this helpful list, but newspapers which were absorbed by others (e.g., the *Indiana Religious Intelligencer* and the *Western Luminary* by the Cincinnati *Journal*) are not cross-indexed. As a consequence the number of papers searched far exceeds the 176 bibliographical entries.

Norton argues that the Old Northwest is an appropriate place to study religious newspapers. It is a frontier which combines many elements of the American population and of the American experience. The assortment of newspapers demonstrates the individualism and diversity of the region. But how can the author generalize about such an amorphous mass of newspapers on the basis of so many scattered readings and soundings? He does so with difficulty and with 464 footnotes, many of them compound, to validate his opinions. One comes to have confidence in the procedure. Norton will advance a generalization, give some annotated examples from the newspapers to support it, and perhaps cite an exception or two. There is the