

Book Reviews

The Diary of Calvin Fletcher. Volume III, 1844-1847: Including Letters to and from Calvin Fletcher. Edited by Gayle Thornbrough and Dorothy L. Riker. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1974. Pp. xxiii, 475. Illustrations, notes, index. \$10.00.)

A visitor to Indianapolis in the 1840s might well have carried with him a letter of introduction to Calvin Fletcher, one of the city's most important businessmen. Presenting the letter to Fletcher at the office of Fletcher and Butler, collection agents, or perhaps at the Indianapolis branch of the State Bank (of which Fletcher was president after the end of May, 1844), the stranger might have been invited to dinner with the Fletcher family. On that occasion he would have broken bread with the *paterfamilias* and Sarah, his wife, perhaps as many as eight of their eleven children (one or more of the older boys being away at school and the youngest in the nursery), at least two young bound girls who lived as members of the family, and any number of visiting relatives. The table would have been laden with food from the Fletcher farms in the environs of the city, the crackling fire replenished with logs from the farms' woodlots. Dinner over, the host would have taken the visitor to call on other businessmen, or he might have invited his guest to accompany him to a church or temperance meeting.

It is this pleasant life, with its underlying anxieties, to be sure, that Fletcher chronicles in the third published volume of his diary. The first volume (1817-1838) largely concerned Calvin's and Sarah's struggle to establish themselves in Indianapolis; the second volume (1838-1843) covered years of economic depression; finally, in this volume, the Fletchers come to enjoy the satisfactions of relative affluence—albeit the diarist often failed to recognize his blessings.

Although Fletcher occasionally referred in his diary to national or international events, his focus was on local matters. At the end of December, 1846, he recorded the dissolution of his eleven year partnership with Ovid Butler, the two men having brought their collection agency to a close. But by that time Fletcher was deeply absorbed in the affairs of the State Bank, and through the middle 1840s he continued to expand his farms and to speculate in cattle and hogs. He described his many business trips in Indiana and to Cincinnati

by horseback, buggy, steamboat, and railroad in fortunate detail. Thus his diary remains of interest to economic and business historians. Fletcher's concern with local schools and his many references to the experiences of his sons who attended Brown University at Providence, Rhode Island, provide sidelights on education in the period. Comments on illness in the family and community, the practice of medicine, farm tenancy, and free blacks in Indianapolis all add value to the diary.

Fletcher was an introspective person who constantly measured his conduct against his ideal of what a just man should be, and always found himself wanting. The modern reader might give him better marks. Industrious to a fault, Fletcher was up betimes to spend an hour or more reading improving literature before he began the day's work. He labored hard—at home, in his office, at the bank, on his farms, in the community—and he had a loving regard for his wife and children. Not of an age that that recognized a generation gap, he often tortured himself with the suspicion that his sons failed to appreciate him, but he never relaxed his efforts in their behalf. It is difficult to believe that he could have done much more, though he might have been more gracious in the doing.

A word should be added about Sarah Fletcher. On October 19, 1846, at the age of forty-five, she gave birth to her ninth son, her eleventh and last child, and thus brought to an end twenty-three years of childbearing. (All the children were to live into adulthood, surely an unusual family record for the time.) Through it all, and around bouts of illness, Sarah continued to oversee the housekeeping, to work hard in the home and on the farms, to fill her role as the wife of an influential community leader. On the subjects of Sarah, her daughters, other female relatives, and the bound girls Fletcher's diary is a not to be overlooked source of women's history.

The editors have brought to the preparation of this volume the same careful scholarship and attention to detail that distinguishes the earlier volumes.

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