



F A N N Y

K E M B L E ' S

J O U R N A L S

edited and with an introduction by  
Catherine Clinton

# Fanny Kemble's Journals

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
CATHERINE CLINTON



*Harvard University Press*

*Cambridge, Massachusetts*

*London, England*

2000

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Printed in the United States of America

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Kemble, Fanny, 1809–1893.

[Journals. Selections]

Fanny Kemble's journals / edited and with an introduction by Catherine Clinton.

p. cm. — (The John Harvard Library)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-674-00305-5 (alk. paper)—ISBN 0-674-00440-X (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Kemble, Fanny, 1809–1893—Diaries. 2. Kemble, Fanny, 1809–1893—Correspondence.
3. Actors—Great Britain—Diaries. 4. Actors—Great Britain—Correspondence. 5. Plantation owners' spouses—Georgia—Diaries. 6. Plantation owners' spouses—Georgia—Correspondence. I. Clinton, Catherine, 1952– II. Title. III. Series.

PN2598.K4 A25 2000

792'.028'092—dc21

[B]

00-035039

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## Chronology

- 1809 27 November: Frances Anne Kemble (FAK) born in London to Charles and Maria Therese (de Camp) Kemble
- 1814 Sent to school in Bath
- 1815 Returns home to London
- 1817 Sent to Madame Faudier's school in Boulogne
- 1819 Returns home to Craven Hill, Bayswater, London
- 1821 Sent to Mrs. Rowden's School in Paris
- 1825 Returns to family home in Weybridge; formal schooling ends
- 1827 At Heath Farm; meets Harriet St. Leger
- 1828 Meets Anna Jameson in London; spends year in Edinburgh with Mrs. Henry Siddons
- 1829 5 October: Debut at Covent Garden in *Romeo and Juliet*
- 1830 Tours Bath, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham
- 1831 Sells *Frances the First* (drama)  
Summer: Tours Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, Weymouth, Portsmouth, and Southampton
- 1832 1 August: Sails with Charles Kemble and Dall de Camp for America  
3 September: Lands in New York City and begins theatrical tour  
8 October: To Philadelphia  
13 October: Meets Pierce Butler (PB)
- 1833 14 January: To Washington  
30 January: To Philadelphia

- 16 February: To New York City; meets Catharine Sedgwick
- April: To Boston
- June: Holidays by boat to upstate New York; meets Edward Trelawney
- July: Coach accident en route to Niagara Falls
- 1834 April: Dall dies in Boston
- 7 June: FAK marries PB in Philadelphia
- 9 June: Returns to New York to complete theatrical engagement
- 17 June: Retires from stage; Charles Kemble sails home alone while FAK and Butler honeymoon in Newport, R.I.
- July: FAK and PB move in with PB's brother in Philadelphia while Butler Place is renovated
- October: FAK learns she is pregnant
- December: FAK and PB move in to Butler Place, Branchtown (suburban Philadelphia)
- 1835 28 May: Sarah ("Sally") Butler born
- June: *Journal of Frances Anne Kemble* published (known as *Journal of America*)
- Star of Seville* (drama) published
- 1836 April: PB inherits plantations from Major Butler
- October: FAK sails to England with Sally
- 1837 September: PB arrives in England; FAK, PB, and Sally return to America
- October: FAK and PB in Harrisburg for Pennsylvania constitutional convention
- December: Family returns to Butler Place
- 1838 28 May: Frances Anne ("Fan") Butler born
- August: Family stays at Rockaway Beach, N.Y.
- September: FAK travels with daughters to Lenox, Mass.; receives news of her mother's death
- December: Family travels to Butler Island, near Darien, Georgia; FAK keeps journal for Elizabeth Sedgwick

- 1839 *February*: Family settles into Butler house at Cannon Point, St. Simons Island  
*April*: Family returns to Butler Place
- 1840 *February*: PB and his brother travel to Georgia, leaving FAK behind  
*Summer*: FAK to Lenox; PB to Hot Springs, Va.  
*December*: Charles Kemble ill; FAK, PB, and daughters sail for England
- 1841 *September*: FAK and PB accompany FAK's sister Adelaide on tour of Continent with Franz Lizst  
*October*: PB rents home on Harley Street, London
- 1842 *May*: FAK presented to Queen Victoria
- 1843 *January*: Adelaide Kemble marries Edward Sartoris and retires from stage  
*May*: With PB and daughters, FAK returns to Philadelphia, moves into boarding house  
*Summer*: Family holiday in Yellow Springs, Pa.  
*October*: Discovers letters confirming PB's infidelities  
*November*: Seeks legal separation from PB
- 1844 *March*: Schott scandal: PB accused by friend of illicit affair with his wife  
*April*: PB and Schott duel  
*Summer*: FAK in Lenox while PB and daughters in Newport; publishes *Poems*  
*Fall*: PB demands that FAK sign written contract if she wants to remain as his wife and have access to their daughters
- 1845 *March*: Fan breaks her arm; FAK signs contract and moves back into PB's household  
*April*: Quarrels with PB; departs  
*September*: Sails for England  
*December*: Travels to Italy
- 1846 *Winter–Spring*: In Rome  
*Summer*: In Frascati

- Autumn:* In Rome
- December:* Returns to London
- 1847 *January:* Sells *Year of Consolation*
- 16 *February:* Returns to the stage in Manchester
- 21 *April:* PB decides to sue for divorce; informs legal counsel
- Summer–Autumn:* FAK tours English provinces
- 1848 *February:* Appears with Macready in London
- March:* Begins career as Shakespearean reader
- 29 *March:* PB files for divorce in Philadelphia on grounds of desertion
- 24 *April:* FAK receives legal notice of divorce
- Summer:* Returns to Philadelphia
- Autumn:* Visits Lenox
- 1849 *Spring:* Buys house in Lenox, the Perch
- April:* Divorce proceedings postponed until September
- Summer:* Spends two months with Sally and Fan in Lenox
- September:* Divorce finalized, out-of-court settlement: FAK granted annuity and two months a year with daughters
- Fall:* Tours Boston and New York with readings; publishes *Poems*
- 1850 *Spring:* PB interferes with correspondence between FAK and daughters
- FAK returns to London
- 1851 Continues career as Shakespearean reader
- 1852 *January:* Takes over care of Harry, her brother Henry's illegitimate son
- 1853 In Rome with Adelaide and Edward Sartoris
- 1854 Tours and lectures in England; brother Henry committed to Moorcroft Asylum
- November:* Charles Kemble dies
- 1856 *May:* FAK returns to U.S. when Sarah turns twenty-one
- Summer:* Tours the West with Shakespearean readings

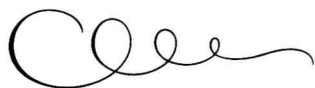


- 1857 John Kemble (FAK's older brother) dies; Henry Kemble dies in asylum
- 1859 *February*: Debt forces PB to sell slaves in Georgia  
*May*: Fan turns twenty-one  
 Sarah marries Owen Wister, Philadelphia doctor  
*Summer*: FAK travels to Europe with Fan
- 1860 *Spring*: Returns with Fan to Philadelphia  
*14 July*: Owen Wister, Jr. (FAK's first grandchild) born in Philadelphia  
*December*: South Carolina secedes
- 1861 *April*: PB and Fan go South  
*August*: PB arrested on charges of treason  
*September*: PB released
- 1862 FAK travels with Fan in England and Switzerland
- 1863 *May*: Publishes *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation* (American edition in June)  
 Publishes *Plays*, which contains her third drama, *An English Tragedy*
- 1865 *April*: In London with Fan when Confederacy surrenders; Fan plans return to U.S.
- 1866 *March*: PB and Fan head to Georgia
- 1867 *July*: Fan returns to Philadelphia  
*August*: PB dies of fever in Georgia  
*October*: Fan and Owen Wister travel to Georgia
- 1868 *Spring*: FAK tours Great Lakes, gives Shakespearean readings  
*August*: Makes plans to live at Butler Place with daughters
- 1869 *November*: Fan meets James Leigh
- 1871 *June*: Fan marries James Leigh in London  
*Autumn*: FAK in Rome with Leigh, Wister, and Sartoris families
- 1872 In Rome
- 1873 *January*: Meets Henry James in Rome

- 1874 Returns to U.S. with daughters  
 Harriet St. Leger returns correspondence; FAK begins to edit letters  
*May*: Moves to York Farm, Pa.  
*July*: Alice Dudley Leigh (granddaughter) born at York Farm
- 1875 *August*: *Atlantic Monthly* begins to serialize autobiographical articles  
*October*: FAK acquires typewriter  
 Is contacted by British publisher Richard Bentley about expanding articles into a book
- 1876 *January*: Fan gives birth to a son, Pierce Butler Leigh, who dies shortly after  
*June*: Leighs decide to return to England  
*Summer*: FAK in Lenox  
*Fall*: Visits Boston; makes plans to return to England
- 1877 *January*: Sails for England with James, Fan, and Alice Leigh  
*February*: In Ireland; visits Harriet St. Leger  
*Spring*: Rents house in Connaught Square, London  
*June*: To Switzerland (and summers there most years until 1889)  
*September*: Returns to England  
*October*: Holidays in Wales with Harriet St. Leger  
*December*: Spends Christmas holidays in Stratford with the Leighs; Henry James visits
- 1878 *Fall*: *Records of a Girlhood* published in England (American edition, 1879)  
 Harriet St. Leger dies
- 1879 *February*: Leases apartment in Queen Anne's Mansions, London  
*June*: Visits sister Adelaide before annual trip to Switzerland  
*4 August*: Adelaide dies while FAK is abroad  
*2 November*: Pierce Butler Leigh (grandson) born in England

- 1880 Pierce Butler Leigh dies  
*December*: FAK spends Christmas with Fan and Alice Leigh
- 1881 *May*: Is begged by Fan not to publish another installment of her autobiography, which would cover her married life; refuses  
Publishes *Records of Later Life* (American edition, 1882), and *Notes of Some of Shakespeare's Plays*  
*Fall*: Wister family visits London; travels with FAK and Henry James to Paris
- 1883 FAK publishes a more complete edition of *Poems*; Fan publishes *Ten Years on a Georgian Plantation*
- 1887 *Summer*: With Henry James, holidays at Lago Maggiore, Italy
- 1888 Moves in with the Leighs in their London home
- 1889 Publishes *The Adventures of Mr. John Timothy Homespun in Switzerland* and first novel, *Far Away and Long Ago*
- 1890 Publishes final installment of memoirs, *Further Records* (American edition, 1891)
- 1893 *15 January*: Dies at Fan's home in London and is buried at Kensal Green Cemetery

# Introduction



Talent gave English actress Fanny Kemble (1809–1893) access to the rich and famous while she was barely out of her teens. During her long and productive career over the course of half a century, she published six works of memoir totaling eleven volumes, which covered her life from her teenage years into her seventies. *Fanny Kemble's Journals* offers excerpts from this remarkable body of work.<sup>1</sup>

All those who knew her noted how witty and engaging Kemble was in person. Her captivating conversational style carried over into her writing. Kemble's distinctive prose allows us a window into her privileged world of White House audiences and London literary salons and takes us behind the scenes on a southern plantation and among Italian peasants. Reading her letters and journals is like being perched on Kemble's shoulder, being offered a ringside view of the nineteenth century.

Frances Anne Kemble was born in the first decade of the nineteenth century and died in the last. She was a member of the first family of the British theater, the niece of John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons, both so notable that the annals of the London stage have designated the turn of the nineteenth century as “the Kemble era.” Fanny

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1. For a full account of Kemble's life and work, see Catherine Clinton, *Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

herself became an acclaimed actress in 1829, following her first stage appearance as Shakespeare's Juliet at London's Covent Garden. Her debut made her an overnight sensation. When she and her father, celebrated actor Charles Kemble, toured America three seasons later, she gained an international reputation as the rising star of her generation.

Kemble's ability to dazzle her audiences was legendary. But men and women alike commented that her offstage appearance was surprisingly plain. She was short and sturdy, not tall and lithe as she appeared on the boards. She possessed the prominent nose of the Kembles and her mother's dark, deep-set eyes. A female admirer joked that Kemble was both "the ugliest and handsomest woman in London!"<sup>2</sup> When the young Robert E. Lee, then a cadet at West Point, saw Kemble perform, he was smitten—until he later spied her in person at a ball, and confessed in shock that "she is next door to homely."<sup>3</sup> Author Washington Irving had a different response. As a young man, Irving, who was attached to the American Embassy in London when Kemble made her debut and later became acquainted with her, summed up her bewitching powers: "The nearer one gets to her face and to her mind, the more beautiful they both are."<sup>4</sup>

In 1834, at the age of twenty-four, Kemble retired from the stage following her marriage to Pierce Butler (1810–1867) of Philadelphia. Butler was due to inherit vast plantations in Georgia from his grandfather's estate. Fanny Kemble proclaimed that "as an Englishwoman" she had an aversion to slavery—presumably because the British had abolished slavery in 1831. Despite this potential incompatibility, and despite the reservations family and friends had expressed to the couple when they announced their engagement, Butler and Kemble succumbed to their strong mutual attraction. Passion blinded them to fundamental differences in temperament and interests. For better or worse, they tied the knot and proceeded to make a life together.

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2. Frances Anne Kemble, *Records of a Girlhood* (New York: Henry Holt, 1879), p. 82.

3. J. C. Furnas, *Fanny Kemble: Leading Lady of the Nineteenth Century Stage* (New York: Dial Press, 1982), p. 91.

4. Dorothie Bobbé, *Fanny Kemble* (New York: Minton, Balch, and Co., 1931), p. 42.

The couple celebrated the birth of their first child, Sarah, in 1835. When he finally came into his inheritance in 1836, Butler's immense holdings made him the second largest slaveholder in Georgia. Kemble claimed she had no idea about the source of her husband's family money, which is highly unlikely. Although she was able to hold her tongue in public, Kemble's passionate opposition to slavery propelled her and her husband on a collision course.

Longing for a visit to her homeland, Kemble returned to England in 1836 with baby Sarah while her husband remained behind, tending to business. By the time Butler joined his wife abroad in 1837, absence had made her heart grow fonder, and the couple enjoyed a happy reunion. They sailed home together to America, and within nine months celebrated the birth of a second daughter, Frances, in May 1838.

Because Butler was apprehensive about his wife's animosity toward slaveholding, he did not want her to accompany him South on trips to his estates. But Kemble was determined to see for herself what plantation life was really like, and she begged to go with him on his next visit to Georgia. When news of her mother's death reached her in the autumn of 1838, Kemble was devastated. Butler felt he could not leave his grieving wife alone in Philadelphia for the winter; yet he knew he must take care of pressing plantation business. So in December 1838 he brought his entire family south with him to the Georgia Sea Islands. Butler hoped that an encounter with "the peculiar institution" would soften Kemble's radical views.

The plan backfired. Kemble's experiences in Georgia only strengthened her antislavery attitudes, as she documented in her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation*. She detested slavery and hectored her husband about the wrongs she witnessed and about the improved conditions she sought for his wretched slaves. Butler grew deaf to her complaints, which only heightened the animosity between the two. By the time they returned to Philadelphia in the spring of 1839, the couple was disillusioned and estranged. Kemble felt that slavery was shameful and that her husband was diminished by his association with it; Butler had come to realize the implacability of his

wife's antislavery sentiments and feared that she would be even more impossible on the subject after her southern sojourn.

The two frequently resorted to separate bedrooms (at Kemble's request) and fought constantly over the rearing of their children. Plagued by squabbles, spats, and trial separations, the Butler marriage slowly unraveled. During these years, unaware of the extent of Butler's infidelities, friends and family urged Kemble to appease her husband. Though the couple patched up their differences and promised to make a fresh start several times, hope of remaining together faded over time. The final straw for Kemble came in 1844, when her husband fought a duel with one of his friends over his alleged dalliance with the friend's wife. The scandal was the topic of gossip in Philadelphia for some months, but Butler seemed indifferent to both the public's and his wife's reaction.

In 1845 Kemble abandoned her husband's household for the last time. With this action, she also gave up legal rights to her children. She left her two daughters with their father in Philadelphia, while she sailed for England.

When Butler failed to pay the promised allowance pledged in their separation agreement, Kemble was forced to return to the stage to support herself. The comeback of this once-renowned actress generated box-office revenue. But a return to life on the boards proved too draining, and Kemble retired once again.

She did, however, continue performing—as a Shakespearean reader, moving from town to town, reading the bard's plays in rotation as a one-woman show. This successful second career was interrupted when her husband filed for divorce in 1848, charging her with desertion. Kemble sailed back to America in an attempt to redeem her reputation and win back her children.

Following a protracted and acrimonious legal wrangle, with documents leaked to the press and dirty linen aired on both sides of the Atlantic, the couple finally divorced in 1849. Pierce Butler was to retain sole legal custody of his daughters until each turned twenty-one. At the same time, he promised his former wife visiting rights for two

months every summer, as well as a financial settlement. Kemble dropped the name Butler and began a new life, alone.

Kemble resumed her Shakespearean readings, which brought her more than financial reward. Her performances won her a new generation of fans—young Henry James, for one, heard her read—and renewed her popularity with audiences in both England and America. Yet professional success could not soothe the troubles of her personal life. Despite his promise at the time of the divorce, Butler interfered with Kemble's access to her children. To avoid renewed battles, Kemble abandoned the house she had bought in Lenox, Massachusetts, and settled back in England until her oldest daughter turned twenty-one in 1856.

During the late 1850s Kemble spent more and more time in America, dividing her time between friends in Boston, her house in Lenox and her daughters in Philadelphia. Her daughter Sarah married in 1859 and gave birth to Owen Wister, Jr., Kemble's first grandchild, in 1860. Sarah Butler had married into a Yankee family with antislavery sentiments, but her younger sister was devoted to her father's slaveholding interests. When war broke out, the family was divided.

Pierce Butler's suspected disloyalty to the Union led to his arrest by the federal government in August 1861. Although he was paroled from prison after only a few weeks, his daughters were rattled by this experience. Passionately devoted to the Rebel cause, Fan was warned by her sister Sarah to muzzle her Confederate sympathies. Sarah, a staunch Unionist, was active in the Sanitary Commission, and her husband, a surgeon, tirelessly ministered to Union soldiers. Kemble herself actively supported the Union cause, advocating the defeat of the Confederacy and an end to slavery.

The publication of Kemble's Georgia journal in 1863 was meant to strike a blow against the Rebels, to sway British public opinion against slavery and against southern independence. Kemble wanted to insure there would be no European diplomatic acknowledgment of the Confederacy. In fact, England did not offer the Confederacy the recognition they had sought. Whether or not Kemble's book played any role



in England's stand has been debated, but there is no disputing Kemble's willingness to put forward her abolitionist feelings at great personal cost. Fan railed that she could never forgive her mother for this betrayal, and Sarah became entangled in the family feud.

Following Lee's surrender at Appomattox, the wounds of war were slow to heal—as was the breach between mother and daughter. Kemble traveled back and forth between her family in England and her daughters in America. She was deeply disappointed that Fan remained devoted to the Butler estates in Georgia, even following Pierce Butler's death in 1867.

Even after her marriage to British clergyman James Leigh in 1873, Fan Butler Leigh remained in the South and continued her struggle to restore the Butler estates to their former glory, despite the family tensions this caused. Labor difficulties, suspicious fires, natural disasters and failing health heaped troubles on the Leigh family during their struggles in the Sea Islands. Finally, in 1876 the Reverend Leigh and his wife decided to abandon Georgia and settle in England with their young daughter Alice, who had been born in Philadelphia in 1874.

Having been assured that the Wister family would make frequent visits, Fanny Kemble decided to leave America as well. She made her final transatlantic crossing in 1877. Once settled back in London, she decided to earn some money by publishing her memoirs.

With her autobiographical writings, Fanny Kemble once again earned international acclaim and yet another generation of fans. She had begun her memoirs with cavalier abandon, writing to editor William Dean Howells of the *Atlantic Monthly*: “You are welcome to abridge or even entirely suppress my ‘Gossip’ provided you do not abridge or suppress my payment for it.”<sup>5</sup> She added more seriously that he was welcome to trim the text, but asked him not to alter her prose. Her series of articles, entitled “An Old Woman's Gossip,” began in late 1875 and ran for twenty installments. Richard Bentley asked

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5. Furnas, *Fanny Kemble*, pp. 423–424.