



# Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars

*Catherine Clinton*

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## **Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars** Catherine Clinton

A British stage star turned Georgia plantation mistress, Fanny Kemble is perhaps best remembered as a critic of slavery--and an influential opponent of this institution during the years leading up to the Civil War. By the mid-1830s, American society was firmly in the grip of Kemble's celebrity as an actress--young ladies adopted "Fanny Kemble curls," a tulip was named in her honor, and lecture attendance at Harvard fell so sharply on afternoons of Kemble's matinees that professors threatened to cancel classes. Catherine Clinton's insightful biography chronicles these early portraits of Fanny's life and shows how her role in society changed drastically after her bitter and short-lived marriage to the heir of a Georgia plantation owner, whom she derisively called her "lord and master." We witness the publication of *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation*, in which Kemble hauntingly records the "simple horror" and misery she saw among the slaves. The raw power of her words made for an influential anti-slavery tract, which swayed European sentiment toward the Union cause. The book was embraced by Northern critics as "a permanent and most valuable chapter in our history" (*Atlantic Monthly*). In *Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars*, Catherine Clinton reveals how one woman's life reflected in microcosm the public battles--over slavery, the role of women, and sectionalism--that fueled our nation's greatest conflict and have permanently marked our history.

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