

Joseph Rule, the Quaker in White.¹

One of the most estimable men and, withal, singular characters, which eighteenth century Quakerism produced, was undoubtedly the subject of this notice.

From particulars furnished to *The Friend* (London) of 7th Month, 1872, by the late William Bennett, of London²—from an original letter addressed by Joseph Rule to William Allen, of Ratcliff Highway, with some pencilled notes, which was formerly in possession of the late James Marsh, of Stansted, Essex³—from the manuscript *Diary* of Rebecca Butterfield, of Stone Dean, Jordans—and from other sources, we are able to give a picture of this worthy man.⁴

Joseph Rule was born at Poplar, in Middlesex, probably in the last decade of the seventeenth century, and had but few educational advantages. He became a waterman on the river Thames, and was called a “Lack-a-daysy man” from his custom, when in difficulty or danger, of making use of this expression, instead of swearing.

He was convinced of Friends’ principles at a silent meeting at Ratcliff, and afterwards believed it his duty to exhort the people out of doors, and sometimes in meetings. Some Friends could not reconcile themselves to his singular appearance (of which presently), and his labours in the Society were accordingly much restricted. About

¹ To be distinguished from the “White Quakers” in Ireland, of the middle of the nineteenth century.

² Reprinted, with brief biography, in 1882.

³ Now in D., Marsh MSS.

⁴ In addition to the above-named, there is a curious reference in a note to p. 63 of *Dr. Free’s Remarks upon Mr. Jones’s Letter*, 1759, respecting a meeting “on the 12th of February, 1759, . . . at a Woman’s in the BOROUGH who is one of the People called QUAKERS. *Joseph Rule*, formerly a Waterman, who goes about in a broad-trimmed white Hat, with long Beard, and white Cloaths, and used to preach on *Walworth-Common* against the *established Church*, was seen to attend upon the Occasion.”

There is also in existence, in manuscript, *Jon. Collier’s Account of his Journey to Barnstaple with Jos. Rule and Thos. Byrd in November, 1749*. See Henry T. Wake’s *Catalogue*, No. 368.125.

Recent references may be found in Summers’s *Jordans and the Chal-fonts*; *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, iv. 165; etc.

this time, apparently, he went through London preaching to the people in the streets the necessity of repentance, carrying in his hands a small white Bible, which afterwards was in possession of the late Sarah Dimsdale.

Joseph Rule was accustomed to dress mostly, if not entirely in white or undyed clothing, including a white hat; he used a white stick also, and, in his later years, his long white hair and beard added to his singularly striking appearance. He is said to have adopted white clothing in order to attract attention, and to obtain an entrance amongst people of influence and rank; and his faithfulness and humility being exemplary, he was much beloved and respected by all classes of the community.

Joseph Rule was a frequent and welcome visitor at the once celebrated Wanstead House, Essex, then the seat of Earl Tylney, where he was often engaged in rowing this nobleman's family on the water in the grounds, and it is said that the Earl offered him a permanent residence there. Wanstead House, which was built in 1715, was a palatial residence, but through the reckless extravagance of the Hon. William Pole-Tylney-Long-Wellesley, afterwards Earl of Mornington, who married the unfortunate heiress of the estate, Miss Tylney Long, the house was pulled down in 1822, and its magnificent contents dispersed. The poor lady died of a broken heart three years later.

Joseph Rule stayed several times in Betts Street, Ratcliff Highway, at the house of his friend, William Allen, a brewer, uncle to William Allen, F.R.S., the chemist and philanthropist. His carriage in the family is described as loving and innocent, and at times he would communicate edifying counsels, especially to the children.

For some time Joseph Rule resided alone in great simplicity in a white cottage in Upton Lane (existing in 1872), which was built for him by Zachariah Cockfield. In consequence, however, of the attempted intrusion of a thief, he became so much alarmed that he left Upton, never to return.

Zachariah Cockfield was for many years a Captain in the Norway trade, and later a timber merchant at West Ham, where he died in 1786, advanced in years, his widow dying there also, in 1799. They were the parents of Joseph Cockfield, hence Joseph Cockfield Dimsdale, which accounts for the possession of Joseph Rule's Bible by Sarah Dimsdale.

In 1749, Joseph Rule was resident at Clareham (Claverham), co. Somerset. In 3rd Month that year, he was at Stone Dean, Chalfont St. Giles, and Jordans Meeting, accompanied by George "felps," from Maidenhead; they held a public meeting at Jordans, and then Joseph Rule went to Uxbridge.

He was at Stone Dean again a fortnight later, as the guest of Abraham Butterfield, had "a little meeting" on Fifth day, and staying over First day, went to Wycombe.

He was again at Jordans on two occasions in 1757, lodging at Stone Dean, and at Joseph Lovelace's.

In 1762, John Wesley met him in the neighbourhood of London, and says in his *Journal*, under date, Friday, March 5th, "I had a long conversation with Joseph Rule, commonly called the White Quaker. He appeared to be a calm, loving, sensible man, and much devoted to God."

In 1765, when an old man, Joseph Rule removed, as he writes to William Allen, 8mo. 26th,

furder up into ye hill countrey near to ware Isaac foster Lodged with me at a litel vilage called Landvare [or, Londvear, co. Monmouth, query; Lanvair Iscoed, some six miles W. of Chepstow], and I Rent of ye fammer where he was with me a private [?] house; where I live Retiered, Labouring to compose my mind in heavenly things. . . . I am near three Miles from Meeten, ye friends hear are very few, and very poor; hear is one Publick friend that often apears in a Large Testemony, a very honest, poor man, but I have nothing to Say in meeten; ye poor peopel of ye nighbourhood are very friendly with me, and comes to my house to Se me; but I am much allone; I have a fine prospect as I walk in my Garden that I can Se many Miles and se ye endlis shoer, so thus, my dear friend; I Live comforably with content." ⁵

This letter is addressed to "My very Kiend and much Esteemed friend, Willam, whom I Love in ye Truth." The letter reads like one written by the early Friends in its quaint diction. He refers to times of depression, of deliverance therefrom, and of renewed hope. He salutes William Allen and his excellent servant, France, to whom he sends love, as also to his correspondent's son, John Allen, "thy man, John, and to thy brother, Job [father to William Allen, F.R.S.], and Isaac Foster, and friend Headen, and when thou feel thy mind free to write to me, I Shall be Glad to hear." He also was glad to learn "that thy [brewing] coper and thing dus very well."

The next year, 1766, Joseph Rule was resident at

⁵ Transcribed literatim from the original in D.

Cowbrey Farm, near Ross, co. Hereford, which, since pulled down, was situated in a retired and beautiful valley, in a richly wooded part of Herefordshire, and was the native place of William Bennett's wife, Elizabeth, *née* Trusted, with whose grandparents Joseph Rule resided. Elizabeth Bennett was the younger daughter of Imm and Mary Trusted, of Cowbrey, the former of whom was one of the sons alluded to by Joseph Rule below. In a very interesting account of E. Bennett in *The Annual Monitor* for 1892 we find that she died in 1891, aged 92, her father having died about 1816, and her husband, whom she married in 1828, about 1873.

In a letter dated 4th Month 17th, 1766, Joseph Rule writes from Cowbrey farm a loving epistle to a Quaker correspondent, in which "the earnest prayer of poor Joseph Rule" is that the "blessed state of immortal bliss may be the joyful lot of your souls and mine, with all the faithful." He adds:—

I am well in health, and my lot is cast into a sober, loving, religious family, that are very tender of me, and offered for me to live with them freely for nothing, but I would not impose on their Christian love. . . . It is a large farm; I have a delightful room that looks into the garden. They have three sons—very sober, virtuous, young men,—who work on the farm, and we live in much love together; and the Friends are glad I am come amongst them. The townspeople [at Ross] are very friendly; and many of them come to Meetings. I think, if the Lord will, to go with the farmer's wife and sons to Bristol Yearly Meeting. She is a heavenly-minded woman. I have sweet, retired, and solitary walks to compose my mind, and a neat parlour, private to myself from the family, for they keep many servants. So I live very happy in this the last stage of my life; through the Christian love of thee and the rest of my friends; whose hearts the Lord has opened in much kindness to me.

Farewell in Christ our dear Lord;

JOSEPH RULE.⁶

In 1767, 4th Month 15th, Joseph Rule came to live at Joseph Lane's, at Jordans, Bucks.

This year we find him attending the burial at Jordans of Rebecca Charsley, and in 1768 that of Martha Howard and of Mary Child. In 9th Month, this year, he was present at the Monthly Meeting held at Jordans, and a month later at the funeral of Rebecca Mildred there, when Samuel Fothergill and Isaac Sharples were also present, and he was again at the Monthly Meeting in the 11th Month.

In his latter years he was afflicted with the chalk gout, and would frequently put his bare foot out at the chamber window in order to ease the pain, and shut down the sash.

⁶ Transcribed from *The Friend* version, not from the original.

In the year 1770, 3rd Month 11th, "our friend, Joseph Rule, departed this life [at Joseph Lane's], and was buried the 18th of the same at Jordans, Isaac Sharples, Thomas Whitehead, and Joseph Rose [being present], a very large and good meeting." The Chalfont St. Giles parish register adds, "a noted Quaker."

William Allen's account further states that

being so remarkable a man; although it was winter [another account erroneously states it was summer, and it really was spring, or, perhaps, "Blackthorn Winter"], and a retired place, a very large concourse of Friends and others attended his Funeral, so that insted of bringing the Coffin into Meeting, it was set in the bottom of an amphitheatrical Hollo in the Ground [so well known to those acquainted with Jordans], and the multitude ranged around; many testimonies [were] delivered; and before the Company withdrew; a Shower of snow descended and Clad the whole assembly and Coffin in white.

A fitting circumstance truly, as attending the interment of such a white-apparelled, white-souled saint!

William Bennett's account adds that Isaac Sharples repeated the words, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

To conclude, it may be interesting to note that Joseph Rule's grave at Jordans was one of the very few identified, some fifty years ago, when head-stones were placed over the graves of members of the Penn, Penington, Ellwood, Vandewall, Green, and other families. The date, however, 1765, was erroneous owing to the imperfect Friends' registers. The Butterfield Manuscript and the Chalfont St. Giles Parish Register clearly show that Joseph Rule lived until 1770, and at the instance of W. H. Summers, now of Hungerford, the date was amended some ten years ago.

JOSEPH J. GREEN.

Early Friends and the Use of Tobacco.

14th of 4th mo. 1691. It being considered that the too frequent use of smoking Tobacco is inconsistent with friends holy profession, it is desired that such as have occasion to make use thereof take it privately, neither too publicly in their own houses, nor by the highways, streets, or in alehouses or elsewhere, tending to the abetting the common excess.—HARDSHAW M.M., *Lancashire*.