

Anecdotes of Robert and James Gray.¹

The following anecdotes are taken from *Memorials of Hope Park*, by William F. Miller, p. 200 :—

Robert and James Gray, Quaker farmers to the backbone, lived by themselves in a cottage, having spent all their lives in patient and successful attempts at “taking in” the moorland around. They are great readers of the standard works of Friends and others, and their conversation has in it something most refreshingly original, and a good deal of quiet humour too. You seem to be talking with people who lived one hundred years ago or more. Robert, the elder brother, is so thoroughly convinced of our principles, that he does not understand at all the reason why the great ones of the earth should not flock to our standard as in the days of Alexander Jaffray and Col. Barclay. He was one day waiting for the train at a roadside station, when the Earl of Kintore, the biggest man in that part of the country, came into the station, dressed in full regimentals, and presently, walking up to Robert, said, “Well, Friend Gray, and how art thou?” Robert, unabashed, replied, “I am about in my usual, I am obliged to thee; thou knows my name, may I ask what thine is?” “Oh! I’m the Earl of Kintore.” Then, answered the good Friend, “may I ask thee if thou received the Barclay’s Apology which I sent thee.” Lord Kintore replied that he had, but that a friend of his had begged it of him—if Friend Gray had another to spare he should be glad to have it. So, in a day or two, good Robert made the Apology up into a parcel. But meanwhile his faithful soul had been much exercised by the remembrance of his Lordship’s warlike appearance; he must write a letter to him, explaining Friends’ views more thoroughly on the subject, to go with Barclay. In a few days he got a reply, signed by Kintore, thanking him for the book and letter, and written throughout in the plain language. These edifying signs of conviction have since induced Robert to send him the Yearly Meeting’s Epistle and the late address on war, and he has just received a second autograph letter of thanks, “All in the plain language,” his brother remarked triumphantly as he told us the tale.

Throughout First-day [of the General Meeting at Aberdeen, 1873], we had much enjoyed some particularly sweet bells, which rang for service in the church near by. They were so particularly soft in their sound during the morning meeting that they were anything but jarring to the thoughts of some, at least, of the worshippers there. We did not know, however, that for this we were indebted to the good offices of James Gray, who thought that they might disturb the stillness of the meeting. So he consulted with another Friend, lately come to reside in Aberdeen, and suggested that he should go and have a talk with the minister, and see if the bells could not be stopped for once at least.

¹ James Gray died xii. 1902, aged eighty six, and his brother in ii. 1903, aged ninety-three.

But said Friend has little of the pluck and quiet determination which animates the representative of the Barclays and Jaffrays. Not he; the minister was a queer customer, he would perhaps swear at him, and most likely kick him out of the house—better leave him and the bells alone. "Oh, vera weel," said honest James, "then I'll just awa' to him mysel'." So after Fourth-day meeting, he went up to the house, rang the bell, and when the servant appeared, asked to see the person who had most authority over the church. The servant replied, "I suppose ye'll mean the minister," and ushered him into the awful man's presence, "who was dressed," said James, "in a sort of black frock, like a woman's, and a black velvet cap." James told his errand—"I just came to ask thee if thou would have thy bells stopped or rung more gently next First-day morning—I suppose thou calls it the Sabbath." "Sabbath! what Sabbath?" says the minister. "Why, the first day of the week," says James; "we assemble in silence at half-past ten, and I am afraid thy bells may be a disturbance to those ministering Friends who have come to the General Meeting. Would thou kindly ask thy Elders to have them stopped?" "Elders! why, the Elders have nothing to do with it." "Then thou has, and we should take it kind of thee." The minister viewed James over his spectacles but gives no promise. He asks his visitor's name. "Oh, I'm James Gray, and I live at Cults." The minister gathers up his gown and accompanies James to the door, shaking hands with him, James assuring him meantime that all our meetings are open to the public, and "we shall be glad to see thee there next First-day evening." The consequence was that the bells were rung so softly that several Friends never heard them at all. I wish there were more of us who exhibited such courage in showing our colours as do Robert and James Gray.

"Whitby and Scarborough Register."

Some time ago Bernard P. Scattergood, of Leeds, forwarded to D. for inspection a transcript he had made of the above-mentioned original manuscript. From information received from the same source, the owner of the manuscript, W. E. Denton, of Leeds, was communicated with, and he agreed to sell it to the Society, the purchase being effected by William Harvey, of Leeds, who generously paid the whole of the cost. The late owner writes respecting the old book, "My maternal grandfather, Jonathan Peacock, was a Friend, who died at Pickering in Yorkshire about 1874, and I can only presume that the book had been in his possession, as it was found in a box with some private letters two or three years ago, which I think must have been brought to Leeds by my mother at his death."

A full index to the ancient MS. is in preparation.