

Bernard Barton's Dream.

The following interesting letters were addressed by our quondam Quaker poet¹ to the late Joshua Green, of Stansted Montfitchet, Essex; the originals, together with a letter sent to Priscilla Green, of Saffron Walden, the supposed original of "Priscilla, the puritan maiden," are in the present writer's possession.

The first letter is dated Woodbridge, 2/17/43:—

"My dear friend.

"The Piece to which thy enquiry refers is a trifle of two Stanzas only, but the dream, of which it form'd part, was dreamt certainly some two or three, if not more years ago. The Verses are nothing without the dream, and the dream, without the Verses, would be as little; tho' both together were somewhat curious.

"Being just now chin deep in figure work, as we are about a half-yearly balance of Books, I have not time to hunt up the Memoranda I made at the time, but I will try one of these days and find it; if I should not, I believe I can recollect its chief points with sufficient accuracy to enable me to gratify thy curiosity. The two Stanzas I know I can very easily procure a correct copy of, as I gave one to a friend or two while the incident was quite fresh in my memory.

"I address my Letter somewhat conjecturally, guided by the date and postmark of thine; thou canst perhaps let me know if this reaches thee, and whether thy interest in the trifle requested will survive long enough to grant me the indulgence of the delay I have requested. If thou art, as I conclude is most likely, one of a family I remember when I was resident in Essex forty years ago, I think I may trust to thy patience, and to my forgiveness for putting it in requisition. With love,

"Thy affect[ionate] f[rien]d,

"BERNARD BARTON."

¹ Bernard Barton, b. 1784, d. 1849.

The next letter is dated Woodbridge, 2/20/43 :—

“ My dear friend.

“ Though there is not much either in the dream or the Verses which have caused thy enquiry, to repay it when told, as I have found up the Book in which I wrote down the two stanzas at the time, I will transcribe them, with such particulars of the dream as I can now call to my remembrance.

“ It must be some three years ago, at least, at any rate it was sometime prior to the Queen's Marriage, or so far as I can now recollect, to its being talked of, that I dreamt one Night, to my own no small surprise, that I was at the Royal dinner-table as a Guest, I presume, but on whose invitation or introduction, I seem'd to myself, at the time, to have no very clear perception ; but there I was, though not without some occasional misgivings as to its being my ordinary sphere and element, as much at home, if not rather more so, than I have found myself in untitled Society. Though now and then a feeling of the strangeness of my situation came over me at first, it soon wore off by degrees, and I took part, at times, in the conversation, as well as listened with much interest to what was passing round me.

“ I sate at table nearly opposite the Queen, and though I never address'd myself to her unless spoken to, her questions or remarks were not unfrequently so directed to me, that I believe I said more to her than to anyone at table, and gradually I became tolerably at my ease ; far less embarrass'd, I am sure, than ever I should be had I to act the same part, wide awake, with all my wits about me.

“ After dinner, and while Wine and Dessert were on the Table, The Queen express'd a wish that I would write some poetical contribution in her Album. I told her I should have great pleasure in doing so if she would allow me to take the Book away with me that night ; that I would promise it should not be kept above one day, at the longest, and then safely return'd with the best addition I had it in my power to make.

“ This proposition, however, by no means had ' the royal assent '—so used as I was to writing Poetry, after

having put forth some half dozen Volumes or more, I could need no long study or deliberation to pen a Stanza or two ; she would much rather have a simple verse or two, un-studied, than a longer and more elaborate performance.

“ She then added, in a tone and manner of playful command, that she was not accustom'd to ask twice ; that I should find the Album, pen, and ink, on a table to which she pointed, a little apart from that at which the company were seated, and on which a lamp was burning.

“ Of course I had no alternative but to turn to my task, and I sate down to the splendidly bound book, with a feeling of utter hopelessness that I could put four lines together which would be readable. I have often wonder'd since that the perplexity and vexation I then felt did not wake me at once, but it did not.

“ After a very short space of time, finding the talk went on at the table I had quitted, and that I was fairly left to myself, I tried harder than ever I had tried before to think of a Verse or two ; none however came, but when I began to think none would come, in a moment I seem'd to have a line, just enough to begin with, come into my mind.

“ I took up the pen, and in less than two minutes, as it seem'd to me, had penn'd the two following Stanzas :

“ ‘ A blessing on thy crown-ed head !
My Country's youthful Queen ;
If such may be or sung, or said,
Amid this Courtly Scene !

“ ‘ And if a Poet's loyal Love
Might more than this impart ;
Oh ! may that blessing from above
Sink deep into thy *heart* ! ’

“ Having written these two Verses in the Book, and read them over once or twice to satisfy myself they were, on the whole, passable, the feeling of pleasure at having so well got of[f] what had seemed a hopeless dilemma did what the previous painful perplexity had failed to do, and I woke, glad enough to find it was all a dream and nothing more.

“ As the Verses themselves were, at the moment, strongly impressed on my memory, I repeated them once or twice to myself, and thinking them, as in truth they are, a great deal better than any I could have written with the utmost effort and study awake, under such circumstances, I got out of bed, and as I always burn a light, I wrote them in pencil in the first leaf of a Book which I found on a table where the light stood.

“ While writing them, the internal proof given in the *two last lines* of the first Stanza, of the Scene and Company to which they owed their origin, struck me as *curious*, and the simple act of their being the only lines of Poetry I ever composed asleep, induced me to preserve them.

“ This is, [I] think, as far [as] my memory enables me now to put it together, a full, true and particular report of the dream itself.

“ The Stanzas are still pencill'd as they were hastily in the Book, at the time, so about them there can be no mistake. I do not see why there should be anything very extraordinary in a Person who has written so much Verse when awake, inditing a Stanza or two in his sleep ; but I cannot call to mind ever having done so before or since, though I think it is very likely I may have done so, but not waking directly after, they may have been forgotten. It was, I dare say, the strong and vivid impression made by the dream itself, its entire variance with all my usual habits and associations, and the fact of waking instantly after [I] dreamt that I wrote the Verses, which occasion'd the accident of their being put down.

“ When the incident was quite fresh in my memory, as one rather curious in itself, I naturally mention'd it, for some days after, to several persons, whom it so much interested that I began to wish I had kept my dream to myself, so beset was I for copies of the Verses ; luckily I was not called on to write out my dream with each copy, but it happen'd just about the time that I was in correspondence with the Marquis of Northampton about a Book he was then bringing out, a Collection of Original Poems by most of the Popular Poets of the day, published for some benevolent purpose by Him, to which he had requested me to contribute.

“ My head being then full of my dream, I told it to him at some length, including the Verses as part of it. It took his fancy so much that, without asking my leave, he put my letter, Verses, and all into the hands of a friend of his at Court, to show to the Queen. Happily, however, the Party he pitch'd on for this purpose was no other than his friend, Spring Rice, then Chancellor of the Exchequer; and as Chancellors of the Exchequer have more important things to think of than Poet's dreams or their Verses either, this part of his 'Budget' was probably never brought out, or at any rate I never heard aught of its presentation; and, truth to tell, I never made any enquiry about it, for though the Scene was to me an amusing and not an uninteresting one as I saw it [in] my dream, I am not sure that, wide awake, I should come off half as well.

“ If this long account does not tire thee to read, my eyes and fingers begin to weary in scribbling it out, so I will only add my hope that thy patience may out-last its perusal, and thy kindness forgive its prolixity.

“ Thy affect[ionate] f[rien]d,

“ B. B.”

“ P.S.—Now that I have written thee out this long statement, it seems scarcely worth sending, except as a practical illustration of the old fable which states the mountain in labour to have brought forth a mouse. I almost doubt whether thy interest in the subject will hold out thro' its perusal, but thou art not bound to read further than thou mayst feel inclined, and I would have put it in less compass if I had but had time to condense. I shall be a little curious to know if thy patience holds out thro' this long infliction on it.”

JOSEPH J. GREEN.

Many people opposed the project of making the Erie Canal, and among them Elias Hicks. He even preached against it, and very foolishly said, if the Lord had intended there should be those internal waterways, He would have placed them there, and there would have been a river flowing through central New York. After he finished his discourse there arose from the back seats of the crowded house a small, plain man, and uttered these words with great deliberation, “ And—Jacob—dig—ged—a—well.” That was all. No further argument was needed; Elias Hicks was answered.—MARY J. TABER, *Just a few "Friends,"* 1907, p. 59.