

Dr. Lettsom's Rural Fête at Grove Hill, Camberwell¹

"Friday, May 22nd, 1801. This evening Dr. Lettsom gave a rural *fête* at Grove-hill, his beautiful villa near Camberwell, to a numerous but well-selected party of his friends, in a style we have seldom witnessed.

"Soon after eight o'clock more than 500 persons were assembled, a considerable part of whom were beautiful and elegant young women; and contrary to the usual practice of such entertainments, not a single person present found one moment dull, though neither cards nor dancing were introduced. Among the guests were Sir William Hamilton and his luxuriously charming lady; the all-accomplished Mrs. Crespigny; the Archbishop of Bourdeaux; with several other distinguished foreigners, and English military officers; Mr. Nelson, brother of the gallant Admiral; a few of the benevolent society called Friends; many respectable Clergymen, Physicians, Lawyers, Merchants, and opulent Citizens, with their blooming offspring. Two hours were agreeably passed in promenading through the various well-stored rooms of the Doctor's very valuable museum and library, where abundance of the richest curiosities were thrown open for the readier inspection of his friends; and all were copiously supplied with refreshments of tea, coffee, etc.

"At 10 precisely a species of enchantment took place, a substantial temporary room, 100 feet long and 30 feet broad, erected on the lawn at the extremity of the greenhouse (the very existence of which had till then been admirably concealed), was thrown open and displayed the happiest mixture of elegance and hospitality. The tables "groaned with the weight of the feast," which consisted of the best of wines, a profusion of excellent viands, and abundance of fine strawberries, which were actually in a state of growth on the festive board. The roof and sides of the building were perfumed with an immensity of natural flowers; and at the entrance, on a small banner of

¹ This will be read with interest, following the account of Dr. Lettsom in *The British Friend*, for January, by Hubert W. Peet.

white satin, elegantly fringed with gold, were these lines :

To my best my friends are free ;
 Free with that, as free with me ;
 Free to eat just what they please,
 As at home, and at their ease.
 Free to stay three hours or so,
 When uneasy, free to go.—J.C.L.

“The company took the hint ; were as happy as mortals could be for three hours ; and by one o’clock the worthy host and his family were left alone, to contemplate on the high satisfaction they had conferred on so numerous and respectable a party.”—(*Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1801. i. 476-7.)

The above singular account we have only recently come across, and surely no Quaker, before or since, ever entertained such a remarkable company. Special prominence is given to the fair sex, and Pettigrew, in his *Memoirs of Dr. Lettsom*, alludes particularly to “His [Dr. Lettsom’s] enthusiastic attachment to the fair sex,” and “the company and the conversation of enlightened women.” This exposed the worthy doctor to many slanderous stories for which there was no foundation, although Pettigrew says that his “unguardedness of behaviour subjected him to severe censure—he was imprudent, but certainly not vicious.”

Dr. Lettsom was compelled at an advanced period of life to dispose of his beautiful villa of Grove Hill (commemorated by the pen of John Scott of Amwell), and of the whole of his splendid collections ; one can hardly wonder at this if he were given to such expensive entertainments as the one above described.

That Dr. Lettsom was a noble-hearted, good and humane man is evidenced by his friend Pettigrew’s *Memoirs*, and the latter relates that Dr. Lettsom was a most regular attender of Friends’ meetings, except when circumstances made it needful for him to attend other places of worship. The Doctor held very advanced views upon religious matters, equalling indeed extremists of to-day.

Probably what Friends considered his limitations in this and other directions prejudiced them against

Dr. Lettsom, and it is sad to notice that his funeral was attended by very few of his own Society ; and in the very long list of subscribers to Pettigrew's *Memoirs*, one is sorry to find the names of only about two Friends, the more so when one notices such names as Coleridge, Wilberforce, Earl Spencer, and many other eminent men.

JOSEPH J. GREEN.

A Scheme for Expediting the Transport of the Mails, attributed to Jonathan Dymond

A SLIGHT notice of this interesting proposal appeared among a list of presentations to D. printed in *The Friend* (Lond.), of December 27, but there the presumed date was incorrectly given. Charles William Dymond, F.S.A., of Sawrey, Ambleside, has sent us a further note on the Scheme, which is as follows :—

“ As neither date nor signature is attached to this production, it is desirable that its *provenance* and the reasons for its attribution should be stated. They are these :—

“ Several years ago my first cousin, Francis Williams Dymond, of Exeter, found this document among the papers of his late father, Robert Dymond, Senr., whose profession was that of a land-agent and surveyor ; and, supposing—but without any reason—that the author was my father, William Dymond, he sent it to me. It remained in my possession until a year or two ago, when I gave it to my cousin, George Cecil Dymond, of Birkenhead, who has lately presented it to the Friends' Central Library.

“ From internal evidence it is clear that the scheme emanated from one of Robert Dymond's four brothers. The handwriting indicates that the choice must lie between George, the eldest, and Jonathan, to whose usual style of penmanship it bears the strongest resemblance ; and I know of no reason that can be urged against the supposition that he was the author.

“ The probable date would be c. 1820, when Jonathan was twenty-four years of age and Robert twenty-two—lately out of his articles, and commencing professional practice on his own account.

“ CHARLES WILLIAM DYMOND.

“ Sawrey, 11th January, 1913.”

The scheme is presented on a large sheet of rough brown paper, measuring 24ins. by 19½ins. Half of this space is occupied by five plans of the roads near Topsham and Exeter, and below is written the following :—