

George Swan, of Glasgow

GEORGE SWAN, who for more than thirty years was one of the most active members of the little company of Friends at Glasgow, was said to have been born at Windsor soon after the Restoration—a reputed son of Charles II.¹ The boy received the name of Swan from his nurse, the wife of a gunner belonging to the Castle.² In 1691 we find him established as an innkeeper in the Gorbals, Glasgow; his daughter says that he had spent £3,000—a large sum in Scotland two hundred years ago—in building operations in that

¹ For another Quaker offspring of royalty, see *THE JOURNAL*, x. 263.

² A daughter of George Swan, Hannah Robertson by name, published a little volume of *Memoirs*, in which she gives these and other particulars of her father's life. She was said, traditionally, to have herself borne a striking likeness to her reputed grandfather. A friend reminds me of traditions, which in our youth still lingered amongst Friends at Edinburgh, as to George Swan being apprenticed to a goldsmith, who also joined Friends; also that Charles II. remarked that whilst he had made other sons of his *Dukes* (Scots for Ducks), he had made this one a *Swan*. The "goldsmith" is I think more likely to have been Bartholomew Gibson, "the King's smith and farrier" in the Canongate, Edinburgh. He was long a Friend of weight in that city. He is first mentioned in Meeting records in 1676, when he is said to be "deadly sick," but he recovered and lived until 1710, dying in that year, aged 87. Hannah Robertson probably lost her membership by "marrying out," but she kept in touch with Friends, and in her later years, when living in Edinburgh in straightened circumstances, David Barclay, of Walthamstow, and other Friends made her a yearly allowance. She was alive in 1801, when David Barclay corresponded on the subject with my grandfather, George Miller. She probably died in 1808.

The following lines are said to have been written by her on one of the windows of the old Meeting House at the Abbey, Edinburgh:—

"Approach this place, with reverence come,
Serve God, tho' each tongue should be dumb:
Experience that mysterious art,
To feel his presence at thy heart,
And hear his whispers, soft and kind,
In holy silence of the mind.

"Then rest thy thoughts, nor let them roam
In quest of joy—for heaven's at home—
And feel the Beams of purest love,
An emblem of the Bliss above.
And may each soul its powers extend
Beyond where time and nature end;
And reach those heights, that Blest abode,
And meet the kindest smiles of God."

part of Glasgow. By this time he was married to a lady of the name of Ramsey, "a bigoted presbyterian," whose brother was "an eminent merchant in Bo'ness." George Swan is first mentioned in the Meeting records in 1691. The chronicler of the sufferings of the persecuted Friends at Glasgow relates:—

Upon the 18th of the 12th mo: Margret steven³ (comonly caled captain of the whit regiment) with her Companie Came upon us and had near kiled some of us and when on went to the provist and told him he Comanded three oficers to bring us to him and as we went the rable stoned us all the way so the provist after he had questioned us Comanded to put the strangers out of the toun which was done and we Conveyed them to the gorballs and went into the house of on Georg Swan. Petter Corbatt then balzie in the gorballs sent his oficer and Charged Georg Swan not to suffer us in his house and when we were Come to the street the rable fell upon us and had like to have murthered us with hands and stons and great rungs.

At this time it is evident George Swan was not a member, though probably not ill disposed to Friends,⁴ but four years later, in Sixth Month, 1695, we find him attending Edinburgh Quarterly Meeting as a duly accredited representative from Glasgow. Probably his becoming a Friend had exasperated his wife, for we learn from Thomas Story that

one of the Elders of the Presbyterian Church in Glasgow going to the House of George Swan, a Friend, who was an Inn-keeper in that City, exhorted and commanded his Wife, she being a presbyterian, that if any of the Quakers should come to their House, she should beat them; and her Husband too, if he should encourage them. And in this she proved

³ Margaret Steven was again active in 1692. "Upon the 29th of ye 3^d mo Thomas Polock on of them Caled Elders & w^t him two toun oficers came in upon us & when they had threatned us went out (& as was reported by some y^t saw them) sent y^e two oficers to Marget Stevens door desiring her to come w^t some other of her Confederats to drag us out of our Meetting house & he brought another Elder w^t two toun oficers more who came & draged us out man by man to y^e hands of Margret Steven & her rable who beat & punched our bodies." Can any of our Glasgow friends furnish any further information about this virago and her "regiment"?

⁴ There seems to have been another friendly innkeeper living in Glasgow at this time. The name of James Thompson, "Jnkeeper Jn Glasgow," was brought before Edinburgh Quarterly Meeting, xii. 1691. He had been "fynd jn ten marks scots for Entertaining Will^m Simson and oy^r freinds at his house but the magistrats pretended that it was for swearing he would dischaige a Gun among the Rable that attended freinds But freinds being fully Convinced that it was meerly for Receaving them into his hous doe y^r for think fitt to Reimburs him of the s^d ten marks."

obedient ; for in my presence, she dragged a Friend of the Town who came to see us, off his Seat by the Hair of his Head upon the Floor, and trampled him under her Feet, tho' he had given her no other Provocation, than by his coming into the Room (where we were) to see us, being Strangers among them.⁵

It is pleasant, however, to note that on Thomas Story's next visit to Glasgow, in 1717, he "lodged at my old Friend George Swan's, where I was kindly and freely entertained, his Wife still living (mentioned in my former Journey thither) but now very loving and courteous, all the old Enmity being slain, but still in Communion with the Presbyterians."⁶ After the usual First-day morning and afternoon gatherings in the Meeting House, the Friends had another meeting in the evening at George Swan's house "which was full as large as any of the other, and open, and the people generally satisfied."⁷

George Swan's name is of very frequent occurrence as representative from Glasgow to the Yearly and Quarterly Meetings at Edinburgh from 1695 to 1730. He was on many epistle committees and other weighty appointments,⁸ and in 1699, as one "of blameless conversation," he was appointed an Overseer of Glasgow Meeting. From his calling as an innkeeper, it was he, naturally, who had to do with the stabling and care of the horses used by "publick Friends," for in those days and for more than a century later, ministering Friends, who did not journey on foot, had generally to make their visitations on horseback. He was especially engaged in the relief of poor Friends and in taking charge of collections for various good objects. As one of those "most experianced with building," he formed one of a Committee appointed Ninth Month, 1701, to inspect "the ruf of the meeting house [at Edinburgh which] was Lickly to com down." In

⁵ *Journal*, p. 95.

⁶ *Journal*, p. 588.

⁷ Several years before this there had been a great improvement in the conduct of the Glasgow magistrates towards Friends. Report was made at Edinburgh Quarterly Meeting, Sixth Month, 1707, "that the provist of glasgow being aplied unto upon som disturbences with som boyes wpon the Complent put the boyes in prison."

⁸ Thus, at the Yearly Meeting in 1719, George Swan reported "yt John Woodrow had some disgust att a Woman Friend of there meeting which George is desired to give his asistance to get it taken away as Soon as possible."

Sixth Month, 1720, the Quarterly Meeting was informed that Alexander Paterson,⁹ a Scotsman long settled in the South, had sent Three pounds sterling to a Friend in Glasgow towards the expense of building a stone wall round Partick Burial Ground, and that George Swan had intimated his intention of "Contributeing y^rto"; and some months later the latter Friend "gav act y^t he had made some progress in forwarding y^e work." Meanwhile, in Twelfth Month, 1720, he appeared before the Quarterly Meeting at Edinburgh and

produced a Letter from y^e Monthly Meeting of Carlisle in Cumberland shewing his Intencion of marriage with Ann Huntentoun¹⁰ daughter to Jsaac Huntentoun of Carlisle and Requireing from there Monthly Meeting [that of Glasgow ?] a Certificate of there unity with him in y^e Concern and of Clearness of any concern with any oy^r woman. Friends here in Compliance to Geo : Suan his Concern have consented to order a few Lines to be written from this Meeting concerning his Clearness and y^t W^m Miller Sen^r Geo : Miller & Cha : Ormston to draw y^e same.

It seems strange that he should have applied to the

⁹ Alexander Paterson was one of four students who were "convinced" in the course of the public dispute held at Aberdeen in 1675 between Robert Barclay and George Keith and certain Students of Divinity (Camb. *Jnl.* ii. 457). He was living in London in Tenth Month, 1690, when he and other Scots Friends were nominated by George Fox to correspond with their brethren in Scotland. In the previous month he had married at Peel Meeting Rebecca Tomkins, daughter of George Tomkins of Melcom, Oxon. He is described as schoolmaster of Devonshire Yard, son of John Paterson, Briggend of Mooress, Aberdeenshire. Alexander Paterson lost his wife in 1693, and a son died at the age of eight in 1700; he is then designated schoolmaster in Lime Street. The death of an Alexander Paterson of S. Dionis Backchurch Parish, Merchant, aged 85, is recorded in 1725, possibly the same Friend.

¹⁰ Ann Huntington was born at Carlisle in 1697. She was said to have been the only one of the ten children of Isaac Huntington who by 1740 had married; one of her brothers was a Dr. Huntington of Gainsborough. There seems no record of the marriage, but it was without doubt duly solemnised. A daughter was born in 1724, and there were six other children. She lost her husband in 1731, and would seem in the following year to have married Alexander Christy, one of three brothers from Ulster who about this time settled in Scotland. Alexander Christy appears to have carried on George Swan's business as innkeeper for some years, but eventually settled at Lunkarty Bleachfield, Perth. There is a curious notice of him in *The Jacobite Lairds of Gask*, p. 168:—"1746, Jany. 17.—To M^r Christie, Quaker, for carrying up six cannon to Doun £9 13 11½." The cannon had been landed by the French, and the above is an item in the accounts kept by Oliphant of Gask, who was one of the Governors of Perth for Prince Charles Edward in 1745-1746. Alexander Christy probably died towards the end of Eighth Month, 1764, as Edinburgh Monthly Meeting for that month was "not held by reason of friends having to attend upon Alexander Christie's Burial." His wife is said to have died in 1781.

records that it "hath payed Allex^r Christy his Accownt for publick friends horses . . . and the^sd Alex^r Christy hath payed all Jntrest dew on Geo: Suans three hundred merks untill the Term last by past."

George Swan and his first wife had a family of twelve children, all of whom died young. His second family numbered seven, but of these, four died in childhood. Two daughters, Hannah and a younger sister, grew up, married, and had large families. There was also a son, George, who was a bleacher resident at Perth in 1752. In the Tenth Month of that year, he and Benjamina Buntin, daughter of the deceased Joseph Buntin of Whitehaven and of Ann Miller spouse of George Miller in the Pleasants, appeared before the Monthly Meeting at Edinburgh, and "Jntimated there Jntenceons of Marriage desireing Friends Concwrrrence therewith and Friends desires they may get there parents Consent." At the next Monthly Meeting, due enquiries having been made, they were allowed to proceed with their concern, "provided it be done according to the Rules of our Society." This was no doubt accomplished, though there is no record of the marriage or of the births of any children. George Swan the younger is said to have died in 1771.

Winscombe, Som.

WILLIAM F. MILLER.

3 mo. 1686. Perukes friends are not to gett nor cutt of their hair without real ocation.

9 mo. 1691. Friends that Remove to settle in the Country &c. are to endeavour to settle near together for the ease and Benifitt of Meetings, and Educating their Children in the way of Truth many having bin hurt for want of care herein.

3 mo. 1695. Oppressive Customes on poore Tennants to be kept out of by all friends, as Capons, hens, Piggs, Days worke &c. and friends not to sett their Lands or Tennements at a rack Rent, but have regard to the Honour of Truth their own inward good and be tender over poore men their Tennants.

9 mo. 1695. Vain Custome of entering potts Reconing potts &c practiced in the world among Trades men as Clothiers Shoemakers &c to be kept out of by all friends, and alsoe bargaining and Reconing in Alehouses or Taverns or Smoaking Tobacco in such places to be avoided by all friends.

Minutes of the NATIONAL HALF-YEARS MEETING held in Dublin.