

## George iv. and Thomas Shillitoe

THREE of the first four Georges had some special relations with one or more Friends. George I. was on very friendly terms with his watch-maker, Daniel Quare,<sup>1</sup> who was allowed special access to him "at the Back Stairs." Of George II. I can find nothing beyond the usual addresses presented on his accession, etc.<sup>2</sup> George III. is associated with his visit to David Barclay,<sup>3</sup> also with the name of Hannah Lightfoot (as is exhaustively set forth in *The Fair Quaker, Hannah Lightfoot*, by Mary L. Pendered<sup>4</sup>), and, later in life, with his visit from Thomas Shillitoe<sup>5</sup> and his friendship for Benjamin West.<sup>6</sup> In the case of George IV. we have a variety of incidents, related by Thomas Shillitoe, for some of which there are considerable details available. Taking them in their chronological order, we begin with an address presented to him (when Prince Regent) on a visit to Brighton in 1813.<sup>7</sup> This address, dated the 6th of Eighth Month, is considerably longer than an average Yearly Meeting Epistle, and deals with the Prince's shortcomings in a way in which it is not usual to address Royalty.

I quote three of its paragraphs :

I believe, never has the report gone abroad and reached my ear of thy grand entertainments being about to take place, but my poor mind has felt sorrow on thy account ; and in spirit I have been with thee as a mournful spectator at the banquet. . . .

Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Thy ways are not right before God, for he cannot behold iniquity in princes, any more than in their people, with approbation or any degree of allowance ; and be assured, if there is not a timely putting away from before

<sup>1</sup> *F.Q.E.*, 1900, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> See *Addresses to Royalty*, by J. J. Green, 1901, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> Published by Hurst and Blackett, 1910.

<sup>5</sup> See his *Journal*, i. 12. Thomas Shillitoe (1754-1836) was a remarkable man and preacher. Though only of moderate education and nervous to an extreme, he was enabled by Divine power to stand before princes and to travel extensively in both hemispheres in the work of the Gospel ministry.

<sup>6</sup> *Ency. Brit.* Ed. xi., xxviii., 535.

<sup>7</sup> *Journal*, i. 197.

the eyes of the Lord and the eyes of the people (that great family over whom thou art placed) the evil of thy doings,—if there is not a ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well,—the eternal crown designed for thee to wear in Christ's kingdom will be irrecoverably lost. . . .

And what is the greatest among men, when left to himself, and bereft of the assistance of his Maker? When laid upon a death-bed, what can the prayers of others avail thee, if He who alone can save—He, whose offers of help in time of health have been slighted, then refuses to hear? Just and equal are the ways of the Lord: if we suffer the day of our visitation to pass over unimproved, the determination will stand, when they call, I will not answer.

Thomas Shillitoe states that he felt it his duty to present this address in person and the circumstances surrounding the preparation and presentation of it are interesting. Again quoting from the *Journal* at some length:

After passing two exercising weeks since the close of the yearly meeting, way opened for me to spread before the Morning Meeting a prospect of duty I had to obtain an interview with those in power who had the welfare of Ireland at heart, and to make a visit to the Prince Regent. After the meeting had been exercised with the subject, a few Friends were selected to have a further opportunity with me, but they not feeling themselves competent to give a judgment, again called together the select members, who left me at liberty to pursue my religious prospects as truth opened my way. . . .

After being left to myself, it appeared my only safety was in endeavouring to aim at a resigned state of mind as to any further openings respecting the Prince Regent.

He then states that he proceeded to Brighton and met a few friends.

Fifth-day, attended the usual week-day meeting; at the close of which information was received that the prince was out riding, and would return about four in the afternoon; but it did not appear to me to be the time for me to move, I therefore kept pretty close to my quarters, and passed a tranquil afternoon. After passing a sleepless night, towards morning it appeared that it would be proper for me to hold myself in readiness this day to get relieved from my burden. During the time of breakfast, our minds were much disposed for silence, and after it was over a precious pause ensued. My kind friend Mary Rickman was engaged to supplicate, in a way that afforded strength to my feeble, emptied, tried mind.

I now felt it laid upon me, to request my Friends who had enlisted in the service, to be on the alert, and obtain information if the prince rode out this morning; and if so, the time and road he would be likely to take: the road not being ascertained, and he mostly taking his ride

over the Downs, accompanied by Thomas Willis, of London, William Turner and Isaac Bass, of Brighton, we proceeded towards the palace, and stationed ourselves on the east side of the stable-yard gate opening towards the Downs. After waiting some time, the gates were thrown open: the prince, with a great attendance of his nobles, made their appearance; but, to my great disappointment, they took the opposite road. Placed in this trying situation I paused, and found it would be unsafe for me to neglect the present opportunity; time not admitting of consulting my friends, I proceeded up the hill with speed, being favoured to feel the best of supporters with me; my companions, as they afterwards acknowledged, were not able to keep pace with me, for I scarcely felt the ground as I passed over it. The hill being very steep, and the exertion great, my breath was so affected when I came abreast of the prince that I was unequal to utter a word, I therefore pushed on some way before him (in order to recover my breath) my Divine Master giving me hind's feet; I then halted, until the prince came up to me, when I addressed him nearly as follows:—

“Will the prince be pleased to permit me to express a few words to him”; on which he checked his horse, and stooping forward, replied, “Sir, you must excuse me, I am in haste:” to which I replied, “I have a letter for the prince, will he be pleased to permit me to present him with it,” taking it out of my breast-pocket. He replied. “You will please give it to Col. Bloomfield”; who accordingly took charge of it. On which I found that my work was not complete until I had requested (of the Colonel) that care should be taken the prince had the letter, and that it was read: being assured this should be the case, this exercise of faith and patience peacefully ended.

From his mention of Fifth Day and that the address was presented the following one, that date proves to be the 11th of August.

From *The Times* of August 13th it appears that on the 11th the Prince rode on the Downs instead of on the Steine as usual, which corroborates Thomas Shillitoe's statement about the hill. He proceeds:

The day after the delivery of this letter was expected to be a day of great festivity at Brighton, to celebrate the birthday of one of the royal family, for which preparations had been made, which brought much company to the town in the morning; but this not being the case, the newspapers announced the disappointment the public had experienced, without any reason being assigned for it. From the feelings into which my mind was introduced during the evening, and the disappointment the public had thus met with, no doubt was left with me but that my request to have the letter read had been complied with.

*The Times* states, however, that the Prince left Brighton on the 11th, and not the day after the presentation of the address.

Eleven years later, when the Prince had become George IV., Thomas Shillitoe had another interview with him.<sup>8</sup> This time it was at Windsor, where he presented an address on the neglect of the Sabbath in Hanover. There are no references in this address of a personal nature. The interview is worth quoting :

I went on Third-day, 20th of Fourth-month, 1824, accompanied by my kind friend, Peter Bedford, to Windsor. On being informed the king was going from the castle to the lodge : we proceeded to the long-walk in the great park ; and earnest was my solicitude to be enabled to discharge this act of apprehended duty in a way that would, on a retrospect, afford relief to my own mind.

We at length perceived the king coming in his poney-chaise down the long walk ; when he came nearly abreast of us, we advanced a little towards the middle of the road ; I had the packet in my hand, containing the German copy of the act of the king and council, the same translated, and my address on some subjects which it contained. The king stopped his horses, and we approached the carriage. On my asking the king, in a respectful manner, if I might be permitted to present him with a packet, he replied, " Yes, Friend, you may."

Several years having elapsed since I had had an interview with him at Brighton, and the king having lost much of that florid countenance he then had, also appearing aged, and being wrapped up in a loose drab great-coat, instead of an uniform, which he wore on the former occasion, some hesitation arose in my mind lest I should be mistaken, and it should not be the king. I therefore, looking up at him, inquired, " But is it the king ? " to which he replied, " Yes, Friend ; I am the king : give it to the Marquis of Conyngham," who received it with a smile ; on which the king said, " Now you have handed it to me." After a short communication which I had to make to the king, he said, " I thank you." We then acknowledged his condescension, withdrew from the carriage, and returned to London with grateful hearts.

We now come to the Yearly Meeting of 1830. In the Friends Historical Society's *Journal* (ix. 173), Thomas Davidson of Fritchley writes :

A year or two before our Friend Ann Hunt of Bristol passed away, I called on her and among other interesting reminiscences she told me that she first attended Yearly Meeting in 1830, and that during one of the sittings the Duchess of Gloucester drove down to Devonshire House and had William Allen and Elizabeth Fry called out, and informed them that the king being in great extremity both in mind and body desired the prayers of Friends. This request was communicated to both the Men's and Women's Meetings, and the business being suspended, each meeting became a Meeting for Worship during the rest of the sitting. Friends were requested not to speak of it out of meeting.

<sup>8</sup> *Journal*, ii. 2.

There is no record of this interview in the proceedings of the Yearly Meeting, but amongst extant private records of this Y.M. there are at least two which make reference to the King's illness :

(i.) Extracts from the manuscript journal of Benjamin Grubb, of Clonmel (1805-1858) :<sup>9</sup>

27. 5mo. The present state of our king's health was feelingly alluded to by different Friends and a hope was entertained and expressed that his end might be peaceful. He appeared to have been a lover of peace.

28. 5mo. It was proposed at this sitting that a minute should be made expressive of the feeling of the meeting on behalf of the king, but it was not agreed to.

(ii.) a manuscript account<sup>10</sup> of the Meeting by Richard Cockin (1753-1845), in which he says :

In the early part of this sitting (5th day afternoon) J. J. Gurney adverted to the illness of the king which appeared to bring some weight over the meeting.

I have been in communication with relatives of William Allen who had access to his papers and to others who were living in 1830, but cannot get any further information. A sidelight, however, is thrown upon events at this time by a slight reference in the *Memoirs of Elizabeth Fry* (vol. ii. p. 110), where she records, shortly after the Yearly Meeting of 1830: "I lately paid an interesting visit to the Duchess of Gloucester."<sup>11</sup>

Finally we come to the Death Bed Scene, which occurred one month after the Yearly Meeting. One version or other of it is well known amongst the older generation of Friends. William Tallack's life of Thomas Shillitoe refers to it (p. 111).

But it has been said, that when that monarch was on his death-bed, he called out, "Oh, that Quaker! that Quaker!" probably as if oppressed with a deep sense of despair and remorse at his inattention to the counsels which his faithful and godly subject had long ago urged upon his attention.

A few years ago the incident was also referred to in *The Westminster Gazette*.

<sup>9</sup> In the possession of J. Ernest Grubb, of Carrick-on-Suir.

<sup>10</sup> In D. recently presented by William F. Miller.

<sup>11</sup> (1776-1857) sister of George IV.

When on the Nile in 1909 I met a great-grandson of Thomas Shillitoe (since deceased). I repeated to him the version I had heard, viz., that the Archbishop of Canterbury, approaching the King, informed him that his end was near, and that he wished to offer the consolations of the Church. The King's reply was, "Send for that little Quaker, he is the only one who ever told me the Truth." Mr. Shillitoe said he heard a similar account, and that this interview was a most treasured memory in the family. I regret that I had no opportunity of submitting the above account to Mr. Shillitoe, prior to his death in 1912.

I have since seen his brother, Dr. Arthur Shillitoe, who lives in Old Jewry, and who tells me that so far as he knows the family have no definite information on the subject, and that his father, who is eighty-eight, is too old to be asked about it.

Mary S. Whiting writes me that her father, the late John Whiting, of Leeds (whose mother was T. S.'s daughter), was present when T. S. heard of George IV.'s death, and that he walked up and down the room at Hitchin, where he lived, in an agony of grief.

FRANCIS C. CLAYTON.

*Birmingham.*

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## Patriotism

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It is well to remember, especially at such a time as this, that they also serve who only stand and wait, and that a member, say, of the "Religious Society of Friends" may be as good a patriot as an Admiral or a Field Marshal.

R. M. LEONARD, Prefatory Note to *Patriotic Poems*, Oxford University Press, 1914.

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BAPTISMS.—At Stradishall, co. Suffolk. 1706/7 Mar. 19. Robert, an adult son of John Stammers, Quaker, bapt.

1707. Oct. 5. Thomas and Mary, an adult son and daughter of John Stammers, bapt.