

John Whiting and Sarah Hurd

THE following extracts throw interesting side-lights upon the matrimonial affairs of John Whiting.¹

Under date 1683 he writes :—

I had drawings in my Mind for some time, towards a young Woman of of good Repute, in relation to Marriage, whose name was Sarah Hurd, of Long Sutton, Daughter of Thomas Hurd, of Somerton, who was a Prisoner with me, for Tythes. . . . I was not hasty but retain'd it in my Heart, near half a Year, before I disclosed it to her. But now in the 7th Month, she having two Sisters going to Pennsylvania, and accompanying them to Bristol, I having acquainted her Father with it, and had his Consent, went after them . . . I accompany'd my Friend and her Sisters on Ship-Board, in King's-Road, where we took leave of them and the rest, and returned with her to the City, and next Day homeward with her, and by the Way laid the thing before her, which she in due time receiv'd and closed with."²

Towards the beginning of 1684, Sarah Hurd and two other Friends of Long Sutton were imprisoned in Ilchester. Sarah was dangerously ill at the time, "being stowed up among others, in a close House."³ John Whiting made a protest to the jailer, with the result that soon afterwards he [John Whiting] was sent at night to "an old dismal Room . . . called Black-Friers, which," he says, "I went down into by a Ladder, and was lock'd down at Night, with a Trap door over my Head," Davis, the jailer, swearing "that we should never come out, or see one another again, all his time . . . and yet in two Weeks time, he let me out again, and her also, both in one Day (the 17th of the 3^d Month) after she had been in Egypt (the Room so called) five Weeks."³

¹ John Whiting, born at Nailsea, 1656, died in London, 1722. He was a scholarly man and will always be remembered for his bibliographical work (see article by Isaac Sharp in THE JOURNAL iv. 7-16). In 1708 he issued a *Catalogue of Friends' Books*. He published an account of his own life and experiences in 1715, under title *Persecution Expos'd*. This is a valuable authority for early Somersetshire Quakerism.

² *Persecution Expos'd*, p. 88.

³ *Ibid.* p. 109.

We must next turn to the minutes of Ilchester Monthly Meeting for progress in the romance.

At y^e monethly meeting y^e last of y^e 5th mo 1684 p^rsent at Jvelchester.

John Whiting haveing this day p^rposed a Marriage betweene himsele & Sarah Hurd, And it being questioned his intimacy form^rly wth Eliz : David this meeting doth see meete y^t y^e s^d Eliz : be spoaken wthhall, to enquire how things form^rly was betweene them, And therefore it is refered to Elias Osborne, Richard Lincolne & Jasper Batt to speake wth her accordingly & give an acot thereof at y^e next monethly meeting.

At y^e monethly meeting at Jvelchester y^e 28th of y^e 6th mo. 1684.

Touching y^e business betweene John Whiting & Eliz : Davies y^e last meeting, referd to Elias Osborne, Richd Lincolne & Jasper Batt & an accot being this day given to this meeting That they haveing talked wth her, doe finde y^t John Whiting did give suffitient ground of expectaçon to Eliz : David to have had him to her husband & y^t upon y^e considerçon of y^e whole matter. y^e meeting doth not see at p^rsent w^t suffitient ground he had to leave her And therefore doth judg y^t therein he hath gone out of truth & don y^e s^d Eliz : great wrong therefore he ought to acknowledge & condemne y^e same, And so do leave y^e whole to Gods witness in his owne conscience.

The further p^rceedings in this matter, is referd to y^e next monethly meeting when Eliz : David is to be p^rsent wth John Whiting, face to face, unless friends can be other satisfied in y^e meane time.⁴

It is puzzling that the foregoing minutes do not appear in the volume of Ilchester Monthly Meeting Minutes 1668-1686/7. John Bright Clark writes : " I have particularly referred to the minutes of the two meetings you name in your letter, viz., 5 mo., 1684, and 28th of 6 mo., 1684, and though meetings were held exactly on those days and John Whiting and Thomas Hurd are recorded as being present at both meetings, yet no such minutes as you quote are recorded, as far as I can see." And yet, from the extracts which follow, taken from the above-mentioned minute book, it is clear that the matter had been before the Meeting at some recent date.

At y^e Monthly Meeting held at Ilchester y^e 26th of y^e 12th Mo., 1684-5.

The business between J.W. & S.H. was moved at this Meeting, but friends judging it better to stay longer from ' permission ' there-of, it was for the present put off.

At y^e Monthly Meeting held at Ilchester y^e 28th of y^e 3rd mo., 1685.

John Whiting having proposed his taking Sarah Hurd of Long Sutton, daughter of Thomas Hurd to wife there having been a stop to

† These two minutes have been copied from a seventeenth century MS. in D. (Dix MSS. G. S4).

the receiving of this proposal for sound reasons formerly : the Meeting do now permit. The proposal as referred to Anne Onsley and Susan Perris and Robert Barton to make enquiry concerning the clearness of Sarah Hurd and its referred to the M. Meeting of the Northern parts of this county to certify in relation to John Whiting in order to their proceeding.

Verily these Friends of the early day had many difficulties to surmount for the accomplishment of marriage with due regard to the maintenance of discipline. But John was not easily deterred, and evidently wished to avoid further delay. The next Monthly Meeting for the North Division of the County was to take place the very next day at Hallatrow, and, as we find from the following minutes that the request was laid before that Meeting, John Whiting probably had to make hasty preparation for a cross country journey on horseback. Are we critical in thinking that *eight* months was an unnecessarily long time to take in making enquiries and granting the desired certificate ?

At a Monthly Meeting at Hallowtrow held y^e 29th of y^e 3 mon. 1685.

An intention of marriage was this day proposed by John Whiteing of Nailsie between him and Sarah Hurd of long sutton Daughter of Thomas Hurd of Somerton & it is refered to Arthur Thomas, Edmond Beaks, Gabriel Daus, Richard Thomas or any two of them to enquire into y^e Cleernes of y^e said John & to giue friends an account thereof at our next monthly meeting.

At a Monthly Meeting at Brisslington y^e 29th of y^e 11th Month [1685].

Whereas formerly at a Monthly Meeting at Hallowtrow John Whiting of Nailsy proposed an intent of Marriage with Sarah Hurd of Long Sutton & friends of this Meeting doe agree to giue him a sertificate that he is Cleare as far a[s] can be found or heard of from all other women in this part of the Country.⁵

Under date 1685 John Whiting summarizes his proceedings with Friends in the following words :

I had intended this Spring, to have proceeded in Marriage with my dear Friend, S. Hurd, having proposed it to the Monthly Meeting she belong'd to, which was then held at my Chamber . . . and went to my own Monthly Meeting (on the North side of Mendip) which was then held at John Dando's, at Hollotrow, the 29th of the 3^d month) for

⁵ From Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Friends in the North Division of Somersetshire, 1667-1688, in D.

a Certificate (which I afterwards had), but the Troubles⁶ breaking out, prevented it one Year longer.⁷

“ The Troubles ” were very real to the Friends of Long Sutton, Sarah Hurd having several relatives (not “ Friends,” John Whiting remarks) in the Duke’s Army. Her house was the centre of a skirmish.

Our story nears a close. John Whiting was again in Ilchester Jail, this time chained to John Hipsley, and suffering great hardship. Under date 1686, he writes :

Being now at Liberty, I proceeded to Marriage with my dear Friend, Sarah Hurd, which was accomplished by taking each other Husband and Wife, in a publick Meeting, appointed on purpose, the 20th of the 3^d Month, 1686.⁸

It is not easy to understand why Somersetshire Quarterly Meeting could not rest “ easy ” with John Whiting’s procedure, which appears to have been so very decorous, but the fact remains that the following minute of censure is recorded in the Quarterly Meeting books, and the marriage entry does not find a place in the Registers of the Society of Friends. Should John Whiting’s “ Paper of Condemnation ” ever come to light, it may explain the situation.

At y^e Q^{rly} meeting at Jvelchester y^e 24th of y^e first mo. 1686/7.

Touching y^e manner of John Whiting’s Marriage, & his Certificate mentioning its being published at sevrall meetings of y^e people called quakers, and friends signeing of it, as if it were in y^e unity of friends, & y^e occasion of offence & devision thereby given amongst friends, & going to a place at such a distance from y^e place, where y^e s^d marriage had bin long in debate (but neu^r allowed by y^e monethly meeting) friends of this meeting do Judge it all for condemnation And y^t for y^e future no such p^rsident be followed by any friends and Jo Whiting hath given forth a pap to condemne his practise therein, w^{ch} is on y^e fyle And y^t y^e not p^rduceing the s^d Certificate according to y^e order of y^e monethly meeting is for Judgment, & a viola^on of thir order, & an evill example for y^e future.⁹

John Whiting removed to London in 1699. The following entry on the minutes of the Meeting for Sufferings is evidence of the great esteem in which he was held by Friends at the time of his death:—“ 16th of

⁶ Referring to the unsettlement in the South of England in consequence of the landing of the Duke of Monmouth in Dorsetshire.

⁷ *Persecution Expos’d*, p. 140.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 161.

⁹ Somersetshire Q.M. Minutes, 1684-1716 (in D.).

Twelfth Month 1722. No Meeting for Sufferings on account of the burial of our much-valued and truly serviceable ancient friend, John Whiting."

M. ETHEL CRAWSHAW.

Quakers' Petition re Governor Belcher

Minehead y^e 29th 11^{mo}
(January) 1739.

Francis Whitworth }
& Thomas Carew } Esq^{rs}

We are lately Informed That Strong Endeavours are making with the Kings Ministers to deprive Governor Belcher of his Governments in New England, And as that Gentleman has given demonstrable Evidence on all Occasions of his regards & Attachment to our Friends the People calld Quakers under his Government and more Particulary by his Influence a Law has been past exempting our Friends from Taxes to the Maintenance of the Ministers there, Jn Gratitude we earnestly Request your favour and Kind Interposition on behalf of the Said Governor with the Ministry & especially the Duke of New Castle in whose Province the Affair principally lyes, And we beseech your Indulgence and Countenance to the Bearer hereof our fr^d Rich^d Partridge to whom we refer for further Information in the Affair wherein you willt greatly oblige & Serve

Your Friends

JOHN DAVIS	THOMAS FREEMAN
JOHN DEVONSHEIR	JOSEPH DEVONSHEIR
JN ^s (? JN ^o) DAVIS JUN.	ABRAHAM CLOTHIER
JOHN READ	ROB ^t DAVIS

[Direction]

To

Francis Whitworth }
& Thomas Carew } Esq^{rs}

In

London^r

^r In Public Record Office, London, C.O.5, 752, No. 336.