

## John Bellers in Official Minutes

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THE years 1693 to 1699 have been described as “the seven years of famine,” and a study of the period leads to the conclusion that the title is an accurate description. Among the torrent of literature containing suggestions for the relief of the prevailing distress, one pamphlet is worthy of more attention than it has heretofore received. It came from the hand of John Bellers and was entitled *Proposals for Raising A Colledge of Industry of all useful Trades and Husbandry, with Profit for the Rich, a Plentiful Living for the Poor, and a Good Education for Youth*. This was first published in the year 1695, and reprinted in 1696. Since then it has been reprinted several times. In 1790 it appeared as an anonymous pamphlet entitled *A Plan of a Public Charity, with some former Plan for the same Purpose*; then again, by John Morton Eden in his *State of the Poor*, issued 1797, and also by Robert Owen in the year 1817. Owen, according to his biographers, owed a good deal to Bellers. He tells us that Bellers “furnished the actual model for the villages of co-operation and unity”; certainly the influence of Bellers can be traced in Robert Owen’s method and ideas.<sup>5</sup>

Bellers’s *Proposals*, in common with other material intended for publication, was submitted to the “Second Days Morning Meeting,” and a Committee was appointed to consider the MS. in conjunction with a Committee of fifteen appointed by the Meeting for Sufferings, including Daniel Quare and William Meade. The full minute of the Meeting for Sufferings reads as follows and is under date of the 5th of Fifth Month, 1695.

Jn<sup>o</sup> ffield signifyeing y<sup>t</sup> he and Theodor Eccleston were desired by the 2<sup>d</sup> dayes Morning [Meet :] to acq<sup>t</sup> this Meet : of a proposall of Jn<sup>o</sup> Bellers’s Relating to the poor (which he proposed to be Recommended to the severall Quarterly Meetings in the Counties) and y<sup>t</sup> Meet :

<sup>5</sup> See THE JOURNAL xi. 93.

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desireing y<sup>t</sup> some ffriends might be Nominated by this Meeting to meet the ffriends appointed by them to Read and consider the same.

This Meet: therefore Referrs the Consideraçon thereof to the ffri<sup>ds</sup> following [fifteen in number] or any 4 of them, with any other ffaithfull ffriends y<sup>t</sup> are ffree to Meet at the Close of the 2 Weeks Meeting at Devonshire house and B. Bealing to give the ffriends absent Notice to be there.

At a meeting of the Second Day's Morning Meeting held the 26th of Sixth Month, 1695, it is recorded: "Jn<sup>o</sup> Bellers Manuscript is left to him to doe with as he sees meet."

No doubt this pamphlet was read widely by Friends. In order to emphasise the importance of the social problem the Yearly Meeting of 1697 made an appointment of eight to consider a scheme suggested by John Bellers for employing the poor. In reporting to a later sitting this Committee recommended that Monthly and Quarterly Meetings should be consulted. The Committee's detailed suggestions are embodied in the following epistle<sup>6</sup>:

To the ffriends and Brethren of the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings in England and Wales.

Dear ffriends

Jn the love of the powerfull holy Truth which hath gathered us into one body and Reduceth all things into y<sup>e</sup> best order We tenderly salute you: hereby signifyeing That for as much as severall Members of our last yearly meeting and others of the Brethren here, have expressed their Deep and Weighty concern for the better Education of our Children and Youth in an Early Jnstruction in the way of Truth, and also in the acquirements of usefull Languages and Sciences, and in necessarie Jmployements of labour and Jndustry, suitable to their age ability and strength

It was proposed to y<sup>e</sup> meeting to consider of the most proper methods and means for effecting of things soe necessarie and Jmportant both to y<sup>e</sup> poor and Rich. To w<sup>ch</sup> end and for the Receiving of all proposalls on this subject a select meet: was appointed by the Yearly Meet: whose Report being Returned the matter was at last assigned unto us to Receive further proposalls, and to Recommend unto your serious Consideraçon. The substance whereof followeth.

As to y<sup>e</sup> printed proposall of John Bellers for a Colledge of Jndustry for y<sup>e</sup> better Maintenance of y<sup>e</sup> Poor and Education of Children. We think fitt to Reccommend the same to your farther consideraçon how farr it may answer the ends by him proposed and how much you may

<sup>6</sup> Sundry Ancient Epistles, p. 154 (MS. in D.).

be willing to Jncourage it by a Voluntary Contribution. ffor if one House or Colledge for a begining were set on foote by a Joynt stock by ffriends of Estates throughout y<sup>e</sup> Kingdom (severall having subscribed considerably already) it might by Right Managem<sup>t</sup> be of Use to the Ends intended and of good Report and Example to the Naçon.

For the better Education of the youth of ffriends there is a concern on Us tenderly to Reccommend to you that care be taken to have such schools in your respective Countyes wherein your Children may not onely be Jnstructed in Languages and Sciences in the Way of Truth, but likewise in some profitable and commendable labours or Jndustrious Exercise, w<sup>ch</sup> may prevent many Temptations attending idleness and instill principles of Jndustry with Literature both in rich and poor, which may also contribute to y<sup>e</sup> poor Childrens Maintenance and take away the occasion of the Reflection of the Dutch Proverb on our English viz<sup>t</sup> That they keep their Children to work to make things for ours to playe withall—and this also will no way be Irksome to Children, when put upon it in a loving way.

3 To which end that care be taken in every County to allow a Competent Maintenance to Masters or at first 2 or 3 Countyes may Joyne and have the use of some Convenient House or Houses Rent free—and any suitable and Jncourageing sune Borne by the County or Countyes, and that in Consid<sup>ra</sup>çon thereof a Competent Number of the Children of Poor friends or such as cannot well bestow Education at schooles be Taught free cost or if Boarded to be assisted therein by y<sup>e</sup> Countyes.

This with w<sup>t</sup> might be added by ffriends that are able to pay 'tis hoped will prove a comfortable subsistance for such as shall fitt themselves for y<sup>t</sup> Jmploye.

4 That in order to Breed up school Masters it be considered by Monthly or Quarterly Meets<sup>s</sup> w<sup>t</sup> poor Children of ffriends are of a proper Genius for Learning that they may be Qualified for y<sup>t</sup> Jmployem<sup>t</sup> at such meet : or meet<sup>s</sup> cost.

5 And its Reccommended to your Respective meet<sup>s</sup> : to take care some Weighty suitable ffriends goe and inspect Schooles and the ffamilyes of ffriends in the severall Countyes, and to see y<sup>t</sup> the advice of ffriends be duly answered in this great concern and y<sup>t</sup> w<sup>t</sup> care possible may be had by all ffriends not to Receive into their Houses as servants any but such as are well disposed. That the Manners of their Children be not corrupted by their evill Communication nor Taught Evill in Word or Deed by their Example ; for Children and servants converse much together, and the Children when Tender are very subject to Receive Jmpressions from such as they converse with.

6 That special care be had that such Children as are fitt for apprentices be put unto honest ffriends that they may be preserved in the way of Truth—in Habitt and Language—and encouraged to goe to meet<sup>s</sup> the contrary practice haveing been often seen to be of very ill Consequence.

7 That whereas there may be divers young Men among ffriends that

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are already in some degree Capable of Teaching Children if any such come Reccommended from Monthly or Quarterly Meetings Rich<sup>d</sup> Scoryer of Wansworth near London offers freely to Jnforme and direct such in his method of Teaching and to take some Pains in compleating them in Writting or Arithmitick They providing for themselves Meat Drink and Lodging.

Signed on behalfe of the 2<sup>d</sup> days morning meet : and meet : for sufferings, Lond<sup>o</sup> the 2<sup>d</sup> 5 mo. 1697, By

BENJAMIN BEALING.

### Postscript.

And its desired that the ffriends of the Monthly and Quarterly Meets<sup>s</sup> Report back to y<sup>e</sup> meet : for sufferings their sense of the foregoing Propositions. Jf any ffriend desire Jn<sup>o</sup> Bellers Printed Proposals Tace Sowle the Printer can supply them.

Following out the Yearly Meeting's suggestion the "Proposals" were referred to Monthly and Quarterly Meetings for consideration, and from the minutes of the Meeting for Sufferings it is possible to get some idea of the opinion up and down the country. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of Eighth Month, 1697, a letter is read from Cornwall Quarterly Meeting, reporting that "they look upon the designe of John Bellers as reasonable and Charitable," but distance prevents them from doing very much. The "City Monthly Meet within the Walls" on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Twelfth Month, 1697, write that "they had Considered of Jn<sup>o</sup> Bellers proposition for settling the poor at Work—and desire it may be Encouraged—and are Endeavouring to answer the severall propositions for Erecting and Regulating of Schooles." Gloucester Quarterly Meeting reports approval of the proposals to the Meeting held 4<sup>th</sup> of First Month, 1697/8, which Meeting directs Benjamin Bealing "to get the act for Jmployeing the poor at Bristoll agst next Meeting." On the 25<sup>th</sup> of First Month, 1698, it is recorded:

Jn<sup>o</sup> Bellers bro<sup>t</sup> in the Minutes of the Bristoll Act And an Abstract of a Bill for the Jmployeing y<sup>e</sup> poor. Jn<sup>o</sup> Bellers and Rich<sup>d</sup> Hawkins are desired to help ffri<sup>ds</sup> to y<sup>e</sup> Bristoll and Colchester Acts or any other for Jmploying the Poor.

The consideration is referred to twenty-two prominent Friends who were asked "to meet at y<sup>e</sup> Chamber next 3<sup>d</sup> day at 5<sup>th</sup> hour in the Evening to prepare Heads suitable to our Case for y<sup>e</sup> Jmploying of our poor."

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At the meeting held on the 1st of Second Month a copy of the "Herefordshire Bill" was brought in, while at the next meeting on the 8th of Second Month, Friends on the appointment are requested "to consult members of Parliament re drawing up some Heads proper for a Bill for the Jmployeing our poor." This was done and on the 12th of Third Month Friends were able to record "A Bill bro<sup>t</sup> in drawn up by a Clerk in Parliam<sup>t</sup> in Relation to the better Jmployeing and Maintaining of our poor."

Progress is reported eight days later.

A Draught of a Bill for the better Maintaining and Jmployeing of our poor of London, Westm<sup>r</sup> and Midx Read and Referred to Joseph Wyeth, Hen : Gouldney and Dan<sup>l</sup> Quare to assist B. Bealing in getting it made more pfect ags<sup>t</sup> next Meeting.

Under date 21st of Eighth Month, the three Friends above named "are desired to get the Draught of the Poors Bill finished with all Expedition ags<sup>t</sup> the setting of the Ensueing Parliam<sup>t</sup>." It was finally produced at the meeting on the 2nd of Tenth Month, 1698.

It is sad to relate that all the labour spent on the perfecting of this Parliamentary Bill was rendered useless by the dropping of the proposed measure! But not to be daunted, the Friends were continued to inspect Bills then before Parliament, especially to obtain a copy of "the Bill Relateing to the Conveying of Lands to any Colledge or Schoole for the Education of poor Scholars or any other Charitable Uses."

On the 20th of Eleventh Month, 1698/9,

John Bellers, Theodor Eccleston, Dan<sup>l</sup> Quare or any Two of them are desired to consider of a General Clause y<sup>t</sup> may be proper to Jncert in the Bill for Charitable Uses or any other Bill y<sup>t</sup> they think meet, for the Jmployeing and otherwise Provideing for our Poor And y<sup>e</sup> Draught of y<sup>e</sup> Poors Bill Is at p<sup>r</sup>sent laid bye.

Although Friends' own particular Bill was "laid bye," they still held a watching brief for the distressed poor during those trying years. On the 26th of Eleventh Month, 1699, the Meeting for Sufferings minuted:

The votes yesterday mentioning a Bill being bro<sup>t</sup> in for the better Providing for the poor and seting y<sup>m</sup> to work Theodor Eccleston &c to take out a Coppy of s<sup>d</sup> Bill if they see cause.

At the same meeting Friends, including John Bellers, George Whitehead, Daniel Quare and William Meade, are desired to petition Parliament for a Bill to be brought in for the purchasing of lands and erecting of workhouses. By the 14th of First Month, 1700/01 it was reported to the meeting that permission must be obtained from Parliament before Friends could employ their own poor, and a Committee was appointed to go through the various Bills which had previously been before the meeting, and report "what they think proper to be done therein." A week later they present the following report:

After divers Considerations It was first agreed that John Bellers, John Danson, Hen: Gouldney, Theodor Eccleston or any 2 shall goe to Counsell upon the stat. 39. Eliz: Chap<sup>r</sup> 5 to enquire whether or no y<sup>t</sup> will not secure ffriends in their Jntent of Work Houses and stocks to Employe and support our poor seeing we want not the Powers of a House of Correction as is much the Purpose of divers of the late Acts for the Poor.

John Bellers is desired by the meeting to "attend the Parliamt upon a Gen<sup>l</sup> Clause Relating to y<sup>e</sup> Poor to be put in y<sup>e</sup> Poors Bill."

On the 27th of Fourth Month, 1701, the opinions of Counsellor North and Counsellor King are brought to the meeting and Benjamin Bealing is ordered to enter the same in "the book of Presidents,"<sup>7</sup> and also "to search to see w<sup>t</sup> Monthly Meetings have omitted to Returne their Answers to this or the six Weeks meet: w<sup>t</sup> they will doe in Relation to y<sup>e</sup> Jmploying y<sup>e</sup> Poor." The following minute is entered:

This meeting upon due Consideraçon of said Councells opinions Is satisfied that ffriends may Jmploye their Poor with safety. And it's agreed y<sup>t</sup> the Quarterly Meets: be acquainted herewith in order for their Reccommending it to the Severall Monthly Meetings if they see meet to appoint two or 3 out of each meeting w<sup>th</sup> Direction to them to meet and Consult for the Managem<sup>t</sup> of the s<sup>d</sup> affaire and y<sup>t</sup> they come Provided with an acco<sup>t</sup> of the Poor and their sever<sup>l</sup> Capacities.

The story of the negotiations for the establishment of the Clerkenwell Workhouse, and the early

<sup>7</sup> Book of Cases, ii. 74 (MS. in D.).

history of that Institution, would require a separate article for its presentation, but it is clear that even before Counsels' opinion had been taken and legal difficulties settled, arrangements were well in hand for the establishment of the Workhouse.

The decease, in the early years of the eighteenth century, of the parents of Frances, wife of John Bellers,<sup>8</sup> required him to give closer attention to his wife's estate at Coln St. Aldwyns, of which place he became Lord of the Manor. The property was held on lease from the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester.

The death of John Bellers took place in London on the 28th of Second Month, 1725. A full transcript of his will was printed on pages 103 to 108.

CHARLES R. SIMPSON.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Fettiplace died on the 4th of First Month, 1700/01, and Giles Fettiplace on the 20th of Ninth Month, 1702.

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## The Preacher and his "Tools"

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On the return voyage of Isaac T. Hopper [1771-1852] from a business visit to Europe, there was among the passengers a clergyman, whose acquaintance he made. At the Custom House in New York this clergyman was in some perplexity about a large quantity of books he had brought with him, on which it was proposed to charge high duties.

"Perhaps I can get them through for thee," said Friend Hopper. "I will try."

He went up to the officer and said, "Isn't it a rule of the Custom-house not to charge a man for the tools of his trade?" Hereplied that it was.

"Then thou art bound to let this priest's books pass free," rejoined the Friend. "Preaching is the trade he gets his living by, and these books are the tools he must use."

The clergyman, being aware of Quaker views with regard to a paid ministry, seemed doubtful whether to be pleased or not with such a mode of helping him out of difficulty. However, he took the joke as good-naturedly as it was offered, and the books passed free, on the assurance that they were all for his own library.

L. MARIA CHILD, *Life of Isaac T. Hopper*, 1853, p. 313.