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Life and Letters of Jean de Marsillac

AMONG various personages who, meteor-like, have flashed across the Quaker sky and disappeared, may be included Jean de Marsillac, or to give him his full name, Jean de Marsillac le Cointe.

Marsillac le Cointe was noble by birth, his ancestors having obtained that distinction as a reward for military services. His family home was Marsillac (or Marcillac), three miles from Nîmes in the South of France. He was born about the middle of the eighteenth century and educated for the army, and was promoted while quite young to the rank of captain in the regiment of horse called de Conti, in which his father was first captain. He, as his family, was a protestant of the Reformed Church or Calvinist.

When yet a youth, being in company with several officers, one of them, the Comte d'Essec,¹ who had been in America and had seen some Friends, gave so favourable a relation of their manners, probity and principles, that it made a deep impression on the mind of Marsillac, and excited him to obtain a further knowledge of Quaker principles and practices. He also read a favourable account of them in a book entitled *La Prédication* which induced him to consult the *Encyclopédie* which referred

¹ Jaulmes, *Les Quakers Français*, gives "le Comte d'Essen," p. 37.

to it and highly commended Barclay's *Apology*.² He made diligent search for the *Apology*, and at length, after much enquiry, met with it in a bookseller's shop in Paris.

Becoming convinced of the unlawfulness of war to the Christian, he quitted the army in 1777, and took up the study of medicine at Montpellier.

After having paid a visit to some religious people at Spiegelberg in Saxony, he turned south, and in November, 1783, he went to reside in the South of France, and visited the community of persons who subsequently became known to English Friends through the advertisement of Dr. Edward Long Fox and his views on peace.

Some years previous to this time, the little community in the Languedoc had made an attempt to get into touch with Friends in England. One of their number, Paul Codognan by name, was in England in the year 1769, but, "being unacquainted with the English language, and extremely bashful, he remained there some time quite unknown to Friends, though he frequented their meetings. He carried home *No Cross No Crown* and Penn's *Rise and Progress* in French concealed under his shirt" (MS. in **D.**, printed in *The Friend* (Phila.), vol. 3 (1830), pp. 158, 173).

In 1785, De Marsillac was chosen to introduce the "Friends" of Languedoc³ to the notice of English Quakers. He carried with him a letter couched in a very laudatory strain: "Ce bon frère, né dans un Etat des plus élevés, suivant les Maximes du Monde, doué des plus

² Thus the account generally given; but it seems probable that "la prédication" was an article in the *Encyclopédie*, a work published in Paris in 1765. I have the following in a ms. collection of "Contemporary Records of Quakerism," which may refer to an earlier edition of the same work, and doubtless refers to Barclay's *Apology*:

"It is the only system of religion ever published that is consistent throughout with itself and with Scripture and reconciles seemingly contradictory passages of Scripture with each other; and though it was first published at a time when religious controversy ran very high in Europe, it was never answered in a manner to weaken the force of any of its arguments." *French Encyclopædia*, published in the reign of Louis XIV, c. 1692.

³ They went by the name of "inspirés," and also "gonfleurs de la Vaunage." The Vaunage is a small district or valley in the bishopric of Nîmes in the South of France. The name "gonfleurs" is of uncertain origin.

grandes Qualités de la Nature et d'une fortune de plus de deux Cent mille Livres" (Casual Correspondence, ms. in **D.** pp. 1-45—letter dated from Congénies le 4^e 8^{bre} (Tenth Month), 1785). "He left France the 7th of the 11th month, and arrived at London the 30th. was at Friends Meeting in Peter's Court the first day following, and made himself known by means of Nicholas Naftel, of Guernsey, who happened to be there also. The same day he delivered to John Eliot the letter from the Friends of France. John Eliot translated the letter which was read at two select meetings⁴ of Friends at one of which J. Marcillac was present, when friends declared they felt much sympathy with the Friends in France, and an answer to their letter was written, translated and signed by [fifty-five] Friends" (ms. in **D.** in Barclay Collection).

The English Friends advise their correspondents :

Let it ever be borne in mind that your Conduct being circumspect, your words few and savory, all your deportment solid and grave and your lives blameless, will be the best evidence of the Truth of your Profession.

Of the bearer of the letter the Friends write :

We have been pleased with the Company and Society of our friend De Marcillac, whom we love in the Truth, and desire his safe and peaceful return. . . His deportment hath been consistent with his profession.

Fifty-five Friends signed the letter ; among them are William Forster, Joseph Gurney Bevan, John Pim, Jun., Thomas Corbyn, David Barclay, Adey Bellamy.

Shortly after the time of Marsillac's return to France, in January, 1786, James Phillips wrote to his mother Catharine Phillips, of Marsillac and the French Friends :

It does not appear that they had seen any friends Books before 1769, when they had No Cross No Crown & Rise & Progress—they never saw Barclay's Apology till Marcillac shewed it them within these few years, i.e., 4th 83 when he first joined them & attended their meetings till

⁴ "The letter was produced *sealed* to the Meeting for Sufferings, the 9th 12mo. and by them committed to some Friends to translate, which, being done was produced the 16th and read *at the close of the Business* of the said Meeting and several Friends named and *verbally* requested to prepare an answer which was accordingly done and produced *at the Close of the Meeting* for Sufferings the 13th 1st month, 1786 where, with some alterations it was agreed to and signed by the Friends present (J. de Marcillac being also present.)" Notice the careful unofficial treating of the subject—the italics are mine. There is no reference to this in the M. for S. Minutes.

14th 9 mo last when he felt himself moved to come here. . . . He went back on the 17th. . . . J. Eliot & A. Bellamy went with him to Dover. . . . He is a sensible & very agreeable man & acquired the Esteem of Friends here & while here seemed to have nothing in view but the object of his mission, viz. to obtain a full account of Friends principles & practices [original in **D.**].

Marsillac announced his arrival in France in a letter to Adey Bellamy from Paris :

Me voicy arrivé sans le moindre accident dans la Capitale ou j'ay eu le plaisir de trouver ma femme et ma mère qui estoient venues au devant de moy à Paris pour méviter la depense d'aller et Revenu de Paris a nismes : avec intention d'aller bientôt a ma terre d'Alençon en normandie [original in **D.**].

He sends warm messages of love to numerous Friends—"nos dignes amis Beven pere et fils, Storrey fry, William et benjamin Rotch" etc.

The following letter in English was written about this time [original in **D.**]:

Paris, the 25th 2^d M. 1786,

I Received with great satisfaction dear Friend thy letter of the 14th wich came to me the 20th I answerd the 21 to my friend J Eliot I am sorry that my feeble health, hinders me to go to Cong^{ies} and Calva^a [Calvisson] so soon as I was purposed, Without doubt the propicious moment is not yet come, but I hope if please the Lord in two or three Weeck's that I shall be able to fulfill my Message, and tho' it much run counter my temporal Business & my family, I will obey when order shall be given to me by supreme Power.

Ty kindy remembrance and that of other friends give me great Joy, I am yet so Weak in the Light, so infected by all Pollutions of the World that I was not Worthy of so kind reception wich I received amongst all you ; I often recollect me in silence before the Divine Word, his restorative voice, comforts my soul, increase my Truth, excites my Courage, & often brings to my Mind, the swet Remembrance of the friends of London, in this intimate relation of man to God, I possess with great Delight this true & tender Love of wich I am reunited with all you in that same inward spirit that the World know's not. I pray thee give me thy Counsel upon the Paragraph I have translated J Pre^e Chri Rev^ds that I send to John Eliot with intention to be communicated to thee and J^h Bewan, and corrected by you : I Writte to J Bevan in thy letter upon that subject give my letter to him :

I Writte to thee in English tongue, excuse my faults dear Friend I endeavour forgot not ty good lessons : I read & writte every day two hours in this language and with time and study I hope any succès.

^s Perhaps, "Primitive Christianity Reviv'd."

I am not satisfaid with my wife and mother my Wife every day she rise against me, she riturn very often to the Plays, Balls, great Luxe, great companys She spends great money for Prayde and Vanity: and she make no account of my tender representations; she would I promise to her, that I not trawell any more; but I answer to her I am not my Master, and the Lord only hat Power dispose of me to his Will: this answer give her a bad humour and made her very angry with me; and I have not yet fund Liberty to inform her of my Journey to Congies &ccc.

I see with pleasure that thou hast bought a horse; this Exercise take with moderation shall be to thee better than all others Remedys of Phisick; a communicated mowing in good air, make easy the circulation of the Blood and other humours, distroy being choaked up & strengthens all parts of the Body; I desire to hear a better state of thee thy wife and family as Joseph Savory do wich I make my Love with his children.

I Give my affection to thy wife, I love her as my mother and am very sorry of her bad health, but I hope she will be better in the first dais of the spring; It will be a great satisfaction for me to hear a good trawell and riturn of Mary prayor in great comfort of soul, and good health of the Body, and Receive News from thee and family so often than it will be permit.

Pray thee to give my love to all friends and let believe me my dear A Bellamy With the most tender friendship for thee thy sincere Friend,

MARCILLAC LE COINTE

N.B.—I have received here none news from Congs &c—I suspect my Wife intercept my Letters and pray thee direct thy answer to my as follows.

A M.L.C : anc ^t Cape de Cavie	<i>Rue nominee St Martin</i>
I will go they Take myself	<i>a l'hotel des- Etats Vnis pres</i>
let send me to the same	<i>la rue aux ours</i>
direction my letters which	
my host savory will receive for me.	<i>A Paris</i>

To Adey Bellamy,
Cutler at the Ship
No 10 in the Poultry
London.

It is evident, from a letter to Marsillac from Adey Bellamy, 8 v. 1786 (copy in **D.**), that the former was again in Languedoc. The letter mentions numerous Friends and is very hearty—"Nichs Naftel mentions thee with much love and desires to hear of thee."

A letter to Adey Bellamy, from Paris, 12 xi. 1786, records Marsillac's return from the South and his intention to rejoin his mother, wife and children in Normandy. During the next years Marsillac made several visits to Fontanès, Quissac, etc., and visited families.

De Marsillac's influence with the Court of France was useful to the cause of religious liberty. From Alençon, 18 ii. 1788, he wrote an account of an effort in this direction, to John Eliot (copy in French and English in **D.**):

Alençon, 2^d mo. 18, 1788.

Dear Friend,

It is with heartfelt satisfaction I take up my pen at this time, to acquaint thee, as well as the friends of England generally, with the progress of our cause in France.

The last year, during the life of our respectable minister, the Count de Vergennes (whom we have lost, and greatly regret), we learned from the general report, that the Assembly of the Notables had taken into consideration the means of conferring the rank of citizenship on the Protestants of this kingdom.

As until this day we had been almost unknown to the king and to his ministers, we were strongly induced to make such representations as might inform them of our existence, and to claim for ourselves, rights which they were willing to grant the Protestants. In consequence, I was directed to write to the Count de Vergennes the following letter:—

“ The Friends of the Christian Society called in derision Quakers, to the Count de Vergennes, minister of the kingdom of France.

“ As the simplicity of our principles suffers us not to address thee with flattery or compliment, we thankfully praise the Almighty, who has condescended to grant a protector to the distressed, and to employ the understanding and power which he has conferred upon thee, to contribute to the relief of suffering humanity and to bless the earth with the dominion of peace and virtue.

“ We have heard, with humble satisfaction, that our sovereign has it in view to grant to the Protestants of his kingdom all the rights of subjects and citizens, but as our principles have hitherto prevented us from approaching the throne, and we are probably unknown to the king, we deem it incumbent upon us to state, that there exist in the southern provinces of France, many hundreds of people, who, without being either Roman Catholics or Protestants, worship God in the same temple as Jesus and his apostles (in the temple of their hearts), and follow, in humble dependence, the precepts of Christ alone, unmixed with human innovations.

“ We have therefore thought it our duty to present to thee our respectful petition. We pray thee to consult with the General Assembly of the Notables appointed to lay before the king the supplicatory representations of his unhappy subjects.

“ We trust, that the spirit of Truth, which is heard in every heart that listeneth to her divine voice, will prove the purity of our principles to the Notables whom the king has appointed to be the administrators of justice, and the dispensers of his benevolence. All the inhabitants of this extensive empire are equally the children of the king, and as we regard

him as a father and a protector, we humbly pray that his beneficence, and that of his ministers, may be equally extended to us, and to the other inhabitants of this country, who are not Roman Catholics.

“ We are with affectionate regard,



“ Thy assured friends,

“ J. M. &c &c.”

The Count de Vergennes replied that he would avail himself of my observations, and desired me to furnish him with a short exposition of our civil and religious principles. I attended to his request, and he declared himself satisfied. The Protestants, alarmed at our proceedings, have strongly solicited to be alone comprised in the plan of amelioration ; but notwithstanding their efforts, they have not been noticed ; we have participated in the king's beneficence, and obtained the same rights and advantages as themselves ; and not us only, but every other sect maintaining order and peace.

Agreeably hereto, in eleventh month last, the king published an edict, in which, without distinction, all those who profess not the Roman Catholic religion, are recognised as useful citizens and subjects of the State, and their marriages and baptisms are valid, provided they be made known to the first magistrate in the place where they reside. Decent burial is granted us ; and every title to property in possession and of inheritance is confirmed to us in the same manner as to Roman Catholic subjects.

In my communication to the Count de Vergennes, I had mentioned that we acknowledged no other baptism than that inward, spiritual baptism, which purifies the soul from the lusts of the flesh, and saves us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the same edict ordains, that, if a child be born in a sect which admits not the necessity of baptism, the father or mother shall declare the birth of the child to the magistrate.

These regulations promise us peace for the time to come. We hope that our silent worship will never excite alarm ; and that we shall not be hindered from quietly assembling in our houses, to wait upon our Creator, as we have always done, in peace. I intended to send thee a copy of my memoir to the General Assembly of the Notables, and the king's edict on our behalf at length ; But I have not concluded it to be necessary ; for I presume that the edict is already known in thy country.

In consequence of this happy toleration, many Dutch families have been induced to come and settle in France, where they facilitate the means of establishing manufactures. My satisfaction will be increased, if inviting prospects excite some friends' families also to seek a dwelling among us ; especially if by commercial intercourse, advantageous to both countries, we should succeed in preserving the precious bonds of friendship and good understanding, too much unknown, for any length of time, between England and France.

Friends in the South are a small body, much in the same state as formerly, unless the lenity they have experienced has rendered them more silent and humble. They are all very sensible, as well as myself, of the tender sympathy with which our English and American friends

regard our little flock.—I hope to see thee again next summer, if the Lord permit. I desire thee to assure of my friendship and esteem, Ady Bellamy, his excellent brother; Savory and his family; Doctor Thompson; J. Bevan; my friend Phillips. I am, with affectionate regard to thy wife and children, thy sincere friend,

JEAN MARSILLAC.

Sarah (Robert) Grubb wrote in her Journal during a visit to the Continent:

At Alençon, we were affectionately received by John de Marsillac, and courteously by his wife, who through the whole of our visit there, which was three days, appeared to enjoy the company of their visitors. Here we endeavoured to take fresh counsel about the way of proceeding to England, which ended in the conclusion, of George and Sarah Dillwyn and John de Marsillac going to the Island of Guernsey to visit the few friends there; and J. Eliot, A. Bellamy, M. Dudley, my husband and myself to London directly, by way of Dieppe, which we pursued accordingly, and arrived in London the 13th of 7th Month, 1788 (*Life of Sarah Grubb*, 3rd ed., 1796, p. 167).

The *Life of Mary Dudley* contains the following, under date, 1788:

We arrived in Paris on the evening of the 29th, and left it again the second of the seventh Month, travelling post to Alençon; here our friend J. M. met us, and we went in his coach to Desvignes, his place of residence, about a league distant. We were kindly received by his wife.

6th. A solemn sitting with J. M., his wife, and little son" (p. 78).

NORMAN PENNEY

To be continued

Ancient Advice for Modern Elders

WHEN Rachel Wilson (1722-1775) attended Philadelphia Y.M. in 1769, "she imparted much solid advice, particularly to elders, whom she compared to the golden snuffers under the law, that were made of the same beaten gold with the lamps; and remarked that if a proper use was made of the snuffers by taking away that which dimmed the lustre and was superfluous, the light would burn and shine clearer and brighter. But some were so fond of snuffing, that they at length wasted the life of the Candle, and had sometimes put it out."

Quoted from Comly's *Miscellany*, vol. viii., in *Bulletin F.H.S. of Phila.*, vol. viii. (1917), p. 33.