

## THE APOCALYPTIC DREAM OF SAMUEL FOTHERGILL IN 1760

Samuel Fothergill (1715-1772) was 45 years old in 1760 as report of his dream was first declared. As a young man he had been wild and anything but pious. In his own accounts, he spoke of having drunk beer "as oxen drink water". His father, an exemplary Quaker, bid him adieu with the words "*And now, my son, farewell. I confess I have no wish to see you again unless you become a changed person*". Such treatment had little to do with Christian love and more with the narrow, restricted relationships among English Quakers in the first half of the eighteenth Century. The changes wished by his father came not through the admonitions of Quakers but rather as a result of a remarkable religious conversion and through the loving endeavours of his later wife, Susannah Croudson (1698-1773).

In 1736 Samuel Fothergill began preaching during meetings. Because he spoke directly from his own experience, he made a deep impression on his listeners. Fothergill accounted for the difficult times in his past, offering advice from his own life rather than from books. Listeners could easily identify with the course of his life.

Fothergill became a Friend who on occasion "saw" and was thought to have a special gift for expressing visions. In September 1760 in Wotton under Edge, a small town in Gloucestershire, he was said to have seen and depicted the End of Time. Quakers and attenders flocked to a "circular meeting". Different from the London Yearly Meeting these gatherings were open to everyone, and many non-Quakers came. It was usual for visitors to such expanded and open meetings to take notes from the sermons for distribution among relatives and friends. Sermons were often later transcribed by hand at home, partly for personal records and partly for wider distribution. For this reason there remain several hand-written versions of Fothergill's dream.

Fothergill had had a similar dream a few months before, which he reported to his cousin Gilbert Thomson on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1760 (S. Fothergill: *Memoirs*, New York, 1844, p400). In the dream he likewise heard trumpets, saw large crowds - among them his cousin - and observed the chains that bound many to the earth. It seems obvious that this dream, later reported in Wotton under Edge, had been many months in the making.

The content of the dream stressed that the Book of Revelations was of relevance to Quakers. It drew on such elements of this book as sounding trumpets, sea and land, white raiment, final judgement, and chains. The intention of the vision was to warn those who, in Fothergill's opinion, were too easily absorbed in earthly matters. The copy given here, whose script dates it to the early nineteenth Century, was discovered in 2001 in the Berlin Quaker Centre. How the manuscript found its way there is unknown, but it is possible that it was brought to Germany by Stephen Grellet. Born a French nobleman, Grellet (1773-1855) fled to New York to escape the French Revolution. There he converted to Quakerism and soon became a talented speaker in meetings. He represented evangelical Quakerism and spread ideas such as a personal image of God, the Trinity, Christ as the Saviour of Sinners, and the acceptance of the Bible as authoritative rather than descriptive. He travelled extensively in North America and Europe, discussing Quaker beliefs with dignitaries, including the Kings of Prussia and Spain, Pope Pius VII, and Czar Alexander I of Russia. In 1814 and again in 1832 he lived for several weeks among German Quakers in Minden, where he most likely wrote the letter on Fothergill's dream. The text deviates slightly from other versions and is included here without alteration.

***THE PURPORT OF A DREAM OF SAMUEL FOTHERGILLS***

Which he related in a solemn and affecting Manner to near 80 Friends at the Crown Inn in Wottonunderedge (during the time of the circular Yearly Meeting) the 15<sup>th</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup> 1760 about 9 at Night, after he had appeared in a public Testimony near half an Hour. He said it had taken such Hold of his Mind, that it would never be erased at times while Life and Memory remained, that he was much pleased to see such solemnity and Quietude in some present. So he found an innocent Freedom to relate it to the Audience and hoped it would prove interesting to the Minds of some present, without improperly revealing the Secrets of the Alinity.

One Night after retired to Rest, I was led to trace back the Transactions of my Life, from my Cradle even to that present Days, The remembrance which filled my Soul with humble Thankfulness and Serenity of Mind and with that blessed Assurance of being eternally Happy if I never opened my Eyes more in this World, Which those Considerations and deep Impressions of Mind I dropt into a natural Sleep, and thought the Dissolution of the World was come, that I heard a Trumpped as with

my natural Ears at which the Earth and Sea were to give up their Dead: afterwards they Ascended in great numbers before the presence of the Most High at the Tribunal Seat of Justice. Many on the Right hand in white and Multitudes on the Left, whose clothing was dark and gloomy, But I thought I accompanied those on the Right, and we were born away as upon the Wings of Archangels to the celestial Regions of eternal Bliss, from whence I returned to View those miserable objects on the Left, for whom all that was within me was concerned, I also saw many of them That were Clothed in White, yet at a Distance, (some of them were Individuals that are now in the Body) I said Lord! What have those done, that they are left behind? then instantly their white Raiment fell off, and I beheld them bound with shackles of Iron, and fettered to the Earth.

Here he ended, but afterwards livingly branched forth in many excellent Advices and tender Admonitions pertinent to the present States of those assembled, but in a more peculiar manner to the Elders who (he signified) were too much borne down with the Riches of this World, and earnestly pressed the youth to devote the early part of their Days to the Serving of their maker, then communicated to them, that tho he had been enabled to close in with the Visitations of Heaven, which were long continued to him, yet it then would have afforded him much more comfort, if he had not rejected the Divine Law in his tender years entreated all to take care how they neglected so great a Salvation, by putting the evil day afar off.

*Claus Bernet*

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Douglas Gwyn, who was very helpful to me in deciphering the text and from whom I learned a lot about Quakerism.

Fothergill's dream has been handed down in numerous versions. Friends House Library (London) holds the following: Reynolds MSS, p. 81 (MS Box I 3/4) MIC 320; MS Portfolio 14/3 (variant text); Swarthmore MSS vol. 6/100 / (MSS vol. 358) MIC 949; Impey MS p. 115 (MS Box I/3/3); Row MSS (MS Box G 2,6) MIC 949; TMP MSS 745/94, 53-54.

Two documents may be found in the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College (PA): MISC MSS 1760, 9 mo. 15, and SC 049 Grellet MSS 1829, 5 mo. 8. Yet another copy is contained in the MS Copybook of Edmund Rushmore (1782) along with a report by

Humphrey Smith, who through a vision in May 1660 foresaw the London Fire.

For Fothergill: Fothergill, R.: *The Fothergills. A First History*. (Newcastle upon Tyne 1998); and Beamish, L.K.: *The Quaker Understanding of the Ministerial Vocation. With Special References to the Eighteenth Century*. Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Oxford 1965. Another version of the dream has been published in: Fothergill, S.: *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labours*. New York (1844).

Those wishing to further explore the meaning of dreams among Quakers during the period of Quietism will find ample literature. I recommend: Gillespie, G.: John Woolman's Light in the Night. In: *Dreaming. Journal of the Association for the Study of Dreams*, X, 3, (2000), 149-160; Gerona, C.: Mapping Ann Moore's Secrets. Dream Production in Late-Eighteenth-Century Quaker Culture. In: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, XVI, 2, (2000), 43-70.