

# Life and Letters of Jean de Marsillac

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**W**E obtain a glimpse of Marsillac's public work in a letter to Adey Bellamy, dated from Alençon, 26 iii. 1788 :

My being lately chosen, by the majority of Votes in the Assembly of the Notables of this Province, Deputy of the Canton, furnishes me with useful employment and having besides many repairs to do at my Farms in Normandie, I do not feel myself at liberty to go into Languedoc before next Autumn. (Translation in **D.**)

In a letter from some English Friend, from London, 12 viii. 1788, there is a reference to Marsillac's son, "charmant Auguste" (translation by J. de M. in **D.**).

Later in this year we read in a letter from Marsillac to John Eliot (copy in French and English in **D.**), of the former's interest in the proposal to establish a School for Friends' children at Congénies. He offered to subscribe "Cent Livres" ("£4 7s. 6d.") per annum and to provide at his own expense all the "desks, benches, chairs, paper, pens, ink and other utensils" (letter dated 15 viii. 1788).

Other letters on the subject of education written by J. M. are in **D.** In P.S. to a letter from his house, Vignes, near Alençon, dated 16 xi. 1788 :

I have at present with me, as my Clerk, a young man who has left the Church & seems to me to be convinced of the excellence of our principles and desirous of examining farther into them. I have good Opinion of his Sincerity ; and on hearing me say, That I hoped to have freedom to take a religious Journey to London, he has applied himself to Learn the English Language in expectation of bearing me company, and getting more information among Friends : I have given him Barclay's Apology and I hope that he will prove one of the Lord's gathered sheep (translation in **D.**).

Jean de Marsillac was in London in 1789, and was accorded permission to attend the sittings of the Yearly Meeting.<sup>6</sup> In a letter to "William Storrs Fry, Tea Dealer, Mildred Court, Poultry, London," earlier in the year, he

<sup>6</sup> See diaries of Y.M. 1789, by Richard Cockin and John Harrison.

expressed the hope to revisit England accompanied by his brother-in-law<sup>7</sup> and the clerk above mentioned (original in **D**).

It appears from his letters especially those written in September and October, 1789, that Marsillac took deep interest in the welfare of the negro, though apparently he had, earlier, expressed public approval of the slave-trade.

In a letter to James Phillips from Paris, 28 x. 1789, he begs his friends to lend him four hundred pounds sterling, for which he considers his property in Normandy, worth more than five thousand pounds sterling, is good security. After consultation, it was decided that J. G. Bevan and Wilson Birkbeck should advance £150 and W. Storrs Fry,<sup>8</sup> Robinson and J. Eliot £250. James Phillips sent Marsillac a bill for £100 and was prepared to send more *if necessary*, interest five p.c. J. P. adds (letter dated 10 xi. 89 (copy in **D**.)) :

I think it proper to add that the notes sent are not what we should call here good security & it seems to me but reasonable that a proper security on thy Estates should be drawn by a Notary & sent here—**make** the whole in one to J. G. Bevan.

Upon which J. G. B. adds :

James Phillips having put in my name at Bottom without my Knowledge, I wish that point to be further considered, therefore thou mayst prepare such security as is necessary & leave the Name blank until thou hears further from one of us. J. G. B.

The value of the security having been greatly lessened by the destruction of his property in Normandy, Marsillac returned the bill to James Phillips, 25 xi. 1789. Lawlessness was rampant, “les Biens de Campagne, principalement ceux de Normandie sont en Proie a la Violence des Paisans . . . qui mettent feu aux Batimens, coupent les arbres, changent les bornes, &c. La Justice criminelle est Suspendue” (original in **D**.). He continues, referring to a visit to the South (translation in **D**. from original) :

<sup>7</sup> The surname reads like Derchaleris.

<sup>8</sup> Nathan Robinson was partner with W. S. Fry in the tea-trade. Both these Friends, with Mrs. Fry, Mary Knowles and James Phillips, were adherents for a time to “the new art—animal magnetism, or the art of removing maladies by volition, aided with gentle motion of the hands.” (*Records of James Jenkins*, MS. in **D**.) J. J. writes rather freely of the business concerns of Fry and Robinson.

I have informed thee of my concern to go to see the poor Sheep of Christ who are scattered about in this Country. The danger of travelling in this time of commotion had alarmed me, but the uneasiness I felt on account of my delay & my weakness, determined me to set out the 11<sup>th</sup> (11<sup>th</sup> mo.) and through the favour of Providence I arrived safe in this province without any accident worthy of remark, having had the comfort of opening the excellence of our religious principles to divers travellers in the public carriages—particularly to a Minister of the Lutheran Persuasion.

The 19<sup>th</sup> I passed my Mothers house but was not free to visit her before I had seen the poor Friends & the School. The same day I arrived at Congénies where in the Evening we had a meeting which was pretty comfortable in which the late visit of our dear Friends was brought to remembrance in a few words which seemed to comfort & strengthen our minds. The 20<sup>th</sup> I was the greatest part of the Day at L Mazolier's School. It is composed of 14 Children of Congénies who eat & board at their Parents and 5 from Gilles or the Neighbourhood who board in Louis's house. Eleven of them read in Piety Promoted, & to my satisfaction tolerably correctly & in a more distinct manner than the Children in the Catholick Schools; Eight are only in the Rudiments. Their writing does not seem to be so perfect. There are but six or seven who write a middling hand, the rest who have begun a few months can form large letters, so as to make one hope they will improve. I was particularly pleased with the quiet & the order with which the business of instruction in Christian duties, was carried on. A mild manner of speaking, an affability of manners, & marks of mutual regard may be perceived. The Elder are required to instruct the Younger—I attended to them assiduously & I am persuaded that Providence vouchsafes to speak to their Fathers when by means of their Engagements in business, the latter have been hasty in their Expressions. In many familiar conferences with them, I have been engaged to recommend to them the Practice of stillness watchfulness & quiet submission to Instruction, of which by divine Goodness they have experienced the first Fruits.

The 21<sup>st</sup> after School we had a Meeting for Business which was attended by the Friends *appointed*. The marriages, births & burials are registered in order of date in one book. It seems to me it would be better if they were in three different books. We proposed a subscription for the Poor, which being the next day agreed to by Friends of the different places will, if the Lord please, enable to supply their wants in a proper manner. We therefore have determined to decline the Assistance which Robert Grubb, & the Friends of Ireland offered us as we hope to be able to do without it.

After this Lewis & some other Friends informed us that several Protestants had signified their wish to put their Children to our School if we would admit them. After endeavouring to discover the mind of Truth on this occasion, it seemed righteous to attend to such circumstances as might promote the propagation of Truth. I testified my inclination to receive them & formably to declare that they must be

brought up according to our principles—but as among their parents some have a sufficient property, whilst others are in such necessity that they make their Children work on their Lands 3 or 4 months in the Year, we thought it would be right that every parent in affluence should pay to some necessitous parent a Guinea a Year in order that the latter might let his child have the whole year to profit by the institution & the Advantages of our School. This seemed generally agre[e]able & Lewis is endeavouring to bring the two oldest forward so as to be able to enter in reading & writing the new comers whom we expect to receive if the Lord please to promote this Undertaking. The further discussion is appointed at Gilles next week where I & divers other Friends hope to be on next first & second day.

22d. We had this morning a numerous meeting to which the greatest part of the Friends of Gilles, Calvisson, Nages, Coudognan & the Neighbourhood resorted. I thought it comforting & strengthening & more solid than formerly. A few words of tender exhortation were uttered & thanks given to the Almighty for the visitation he had bestowed on us & for the salutary effects of the visit of the Friends of London, America & Ireland. Our minds were inwardly refreshed. In the afternoon another meeting to which came several Protestants & one of their ministers who behaved with decency & respect rising & pulling of his hat. After meeting he expressed his sympathy & regard for our principles, declaring that he had long respected them, & that he was sorry he became acquainted with them *too late*. I told him it was never too late to bow to Truth & to submit to one's Creator, to which he agreed. He desired he might come to see me at Nismes, & I gave him my direction. This man seemed sincere, & to have been reached. I shall have freedom for a more private conference with him.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> in the evening (after generally agreeing to meet at Gilles the evening preceding the next first day) I went to Nismes & had a tender & affectionate interview with my Mother.

I am in hopes that divine Goodness is forming for himself more servants in this barren country—and that some of those who have been straying into the Spirit of the World may be disposed to submit to his heavenly power, not only among the Great—but still more among those of low degree.

We have distributed to several Catholics & to a great many protestants the books which our Friends in England sent to us. If towards the end of winter they could send us a few more particularly No Cross, No Crown, I believe they would be useful to many well disposed families.

A Synod of Protestants have examined our books & our Principles with great Rigour & have at length agreed that our religious practices were excellent & that if persevered in, must lead men to happiness.

Of this visit Louis Majolier wrote to Adey Bellamy from Congénies, 3 xii. 1789 (original in **D.**) :

Il est parmi nous depuis trois semaines a nous visiter et nous conforter et qui s'intéresse également a notre bien-être, m'a fait compte de la valeur de 12 guinees. . . . Il est logé a Nismes chez sa Mère.

On the 23rd of Twelfth Month, 1789, Marsillac wrote to James Phillips respecting a "dissertation medicale que je vais faire imprimer," which he dedicated to several of his English friends. This was probably his thesis for his degree at the university of Montpellier and may have been his treatise on Gout, which was printed in Paris, without date, and entitled: *La Goutte radicalement guérie*, etc. Par J. Marsillac, Docteur en Médecine, de la Faculté de Montpellier (copy in **D.**). This work consists of twenty-nine chapters, contained in 220 small 8vo. pages.

The author describes how he has successfully treated himself when suffering from this ailment. There is no printed dedication.

In 1790, Marsillac le Cointe was again in London, a visit which he refers to as happier and more encouraging than the first, made in 1785. The letters of this period increasingly reflect the disturbed condition of the times.

In this same year, 1790, in the Sixth Month, a little band of Quaker missionaries left England for the Continent—George and Sarah Dillwyn and Robert and Sarah Grubb—and at Dunkirk they were joined by J. de Marsillac and Joshua Beale and also "B. R." presumably Benjamin Rotch. Sarah Grubb writes:

We were detained at Amsterdam longer than we expected; one occasion of which was, the printing of some extracts from Hugh Turfords writings . . . which some of our company translated into French . . . an acceptable publication to J. M. and B. R. to distribute in France. (*Journal*, 1796, p. 190.)

The pamphlet (copies in **D.**) bears the title: *Le Principe ou la Regle de Vie des Premiers Chrétiens dévoilé*, Amsterdam, 1790. It was reprinted in Philadelphia in 1816—*Traites sur les Bases d'une Vie Chrétienne*, etc. (in **D.**)

At Utrecht, Marsillac "being tender, took cold, and was confined next day to the house." He concluded to return, on which S. Grubb remarks:

This has been a trial to us, but knowing J. M.'s attention to best direction, and also his desire, if right, of keeping with us, we dared not persuade him to suit our inclinations and convenience (*ibid.*).

Early in 1792, Marsillac sent over several copies of his *Vie de Penn* for distribution among his friends—J. G. Bevan, John Eliot, Adey Bellamy, Storrs Fry, Mary

Knowles, Robert Grubb—accompanied by his “ Notice sur la Guerison de la Goutte.” He adds :

J’ai 17 Malades goutteux a voir et a diriger sur la goutte et plusieurs autres consultants passagers.

A letter to James Phillips, from “ Paris, 19 4<sup>e</sup> M 1792, l’an 4 de la liberté,” mentions the arrival of Thomas Hodgkin in Paris, and that the writer had given him some advice regarding the dangers of the Capital and its corrupt pleasures.

Jean de Marsillac was also interested in the proposal to establish an industrial institution at Chambord.<sup>9</sup> Louis Majolier fils, writing to Adey Bellamy, from Congénies, 17 ii. 1793, says :

J’avois été informé du voyage de notre ami J<sup>n</sup> Marsillac et sa femme en Angleterre, et je pense que tu l’es de ses bonnes intentions touchant l’établissement d’une école près de Blois. J’ai eu le plaisir de recevoir plusieurs Lettres de notre digne ami Robert Grubb lorsqu’il étoit dernièrement à Paris pour ce Sujet. Dans sa dernière il nous fait espérer de revenir en France dans le troisième mois prochain pour le même objet, mais je crains beaucoup que les Circonstances actuelles, la Guerre de l’Angleterre avec la France, mette un grand obstacle à cet établissement utile.

NORMAN PENNEY

*To be continued*

<sup>9</sup> For the history of the proposals for this institution, see THE JOURNAL, vols. vii. and xiii.

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## Burial Grounds and the Children

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The Friends Burial Ground in Long Lane, Bermondsey, was opened as a public recreation ground, 14th May, 1896. The following appeared in *Fun*, soon after that date :

The decorous Quakers demure and staid,  
 Are said to have taken their pleasures sadly ;  
 But ever the Quaker with joy surveyed  
 The face of little ones smiling gladly.  
 And none the less pleasant, or sweet, or sound,  
 The repose will be of the bygone Quaker,  
 Who rests in the Bermondsey Burial Ground ;  
 When over his head in the hushed God’s acre  
 He knew of, he hears the delightful noise  
 Of the mirth of the Bermondsey girls and boys !

Quoted in *The Friend*, 26 iv. 1896.