

## “The Beacon”

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Extracts from letters by my father, James Clark, of Street, Somerset, then just turned twenty-three years old, to his future wife, Eleanor Stephens, of Bridport.

1. Liverpool 1st. Mo. 31st. 1835.

[Earlier in letter re Elections]—“Have you heard of the dilemma W. Gilpin was in about the election through giving another card to vote for some one else? He was taken up with the man and put in Bridwell for a day, at first with 30 or 40 thieves. He got out on bail and was tried last 2nd. day” [and J. C. was hoping to send account in paper of trial].

Isaac Crewdson has just published a book entitled a Beacon to the Society of Friends. I believe it treats on the points that have produced so much difference in our Society, as it seems to have produced considerable excitement among Friends here; many I hear have been writing to him. I have bought the book and hope to be able to look it over this evening.

2. M/ter 2 Month 15th 1835. [Post mark: Leicester, Feb. 17th, 1835.]

Little did I ever expect at one of our religious meetings to witness such a scene as disgraced this morning's meeting at this place [Manchester] and as I know it will be a subject in which you will be deeply interested I take this first opportunity of writing whilst it is fresh with me; for what must eventually follow this morning's proceedings will I fear make it a most eventful Meeting. I attended the Monthly Meeting on 5th day as it was expected there would be some discussion on the religious difficulties that have so long agitated this Meeting. At the close of the meeting, when the Clerk enquired if there was anything to lay before the meeting from Manchester, John Harrison said “that he had to state to the meeting that a member of the Meeting, Isaac Crewdson, had published a book entitled ‘A Beacon to the Society of Friends,’ which contained principles contrary to those of our Society, as it denied the influence of the Spirit.” Then he was interrupted by the Clerk who enquired if he had privately dealt with the individual and informed him that he was going to bring his case before that Meeting. He had visited him but had not told him that he was going to bring it before that meeting and it was at once decided by the meeting that it would be irregular to bring it forward then. At the last Lancashire Q.M. some Friends stated that Manchester M.M. was in a state requiring assistance from the Quarterly Meeting and all the representatives from Manchester confirmed it. Ann Jones was at the meeting that day 2 weeks and preached a most remarkable and pointed sermon. Turning towards I. Crewdson

she said "there be some here pretending to take the Scriptures as their guide would exalt them above the Spirit" or words to that effect.

This morning Joseph Cash of Coventry was at Meeting and gave us a short sermon. Shortly after Wm. Boulton rose and commenced with the text "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed." He was stopped here by Jas. Hall (a Friend of some standing in the Society but not in office) with "I have to request that Wm. Boulton will keep his seat in our religious meetings." W.B. said: "If such be the sense of the meeting I submit" and immediately sat down. Several Friends at once from the body of the Meeting: "We hope Wm. Boulton will proceed." Benjamin Pearson, an Overseer: "Friends must see that this is a most irregular mode of proceeding. No one may interrupt a Minister who has not been forbidden to speak by the Meeting for Ministers and Elders." James Hall: "Wm. Boulton has been forbidden to speak by that Meeting." Wm. Boulton arose: "Will the Meeting allow me to say a few words to entreat that no more may be said on this subject at this time. Let us not forget the high purpose for which we are assembled, which is not for discussion but to worship God. Whatever may be our opinions on this point let us pray for ourselves and for each other that God may forgive our brethren their sins and for this reason because that for Christ's sake He hath forgiven us. Let me once more beg that nothing more may be said on this subject at this time." After a short silence Benjamin Pearson said: "I hope I am not unmindful of the purpose for which we are meeting together, but I feel compelled to state that W. Boulton never has been requested by any Meeting to keep his seat." Wm. Foden, an Overseer, sitting next (James Hall) said: "I must, as an Overseer, request Jas. Hall to keep his seat, he was about to rise." Jas. Hall: "I have as much right to speak on this subject as any Overseer present and although Benjamin Pearson has been pleased to deny"—Here many Friends began to leave the Meeting and several Overseers rose to silence James Hall. Amidst much confusion Isaac Crewdson said: "Let me, dear Friends, say one word, which is to request that you will not leave the Meeting, but let us endeavour to settle into silence before we break up." John Harrison: "I do hope that we shall settle again into silence and that our Friend J. Hall, will keep his seat." After a few words on the propriety of reading the Y. Meeting epistle it was concluded to read it, shortly after which the Meeting broke up. I never beheld a Meeting in such a state. Very many were in tears on both sides the meeting and it was really a most distressing season. With the assistance of C. Gilpin's memory, who is now with me, I believe I have given thee everything that passed. Lieutenant Fabian was at Meeting but I have not been able to meet him since.

It is now Meeting time and I trust we shall have a more peaceful time.

Leicester, 2nd day night. When I commenced this I fully intended forwarding it by this morning's post even if I had stolen the time from my 4 hours rest last night, but it was so cold when I got into Derby this morning that it chilled my intentions. The afternoon meeting yesterday was fully attended. Joseph Cash spoke and a woman Friend and we broke up very peacefully. But such proceedings as these must bring matters to a crisis. The Orthodox, as they would I suppose call themselves, seem determined not to let it rest. It is very grievous that it should be so, for of all I can see of the differences there is not any need of a separation. Friends holding both may I think belong to the same Society. There is not a difference of sentiment sufficient to warrant such a separation between Christians. But if things do come to such a pass ; if there must be a separation, which I would seek every means to avert, may we, my precious Ellen, unitedly pray that our understandings be enlightened to comprehend the precious word and may we take as our only guide the only direct revelation of the will of our Heavenly Father and as in true sincerity of heart we do pray that the Holy Spirit may enlighten us, the merciful God who heareth prayer will assuredly hear us and we shall on this most important subject be preserved in unity. . . .

I was at I. Crewdson's on 6th day evening as he had hoped I would spend an evening there as he wished to send something to Uncle [Thomas] Clark. He wrote my name in one of his books and gave me, “ if,” he said, “ I would have a book containing such poison.” He was much pleased to hear that Wm. Forster was going into Cornwall. Joseph Sparkes of Exeter was the author of that little book<sup>1</sup> that was distributed in your M.M. and is going to publish a 2nd edition with his name attached. I should not have written quite so soon but for these occurrences. . . .

I had  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour's conversation with Wm. Howitt this afternoon, principally on the state of our Society. I did not quite like all his views. . . . But it is nearly 2 o'clock, I must conclude.

Liverpool 8th Mo. 17th [1835. . . . I hope I can get to Manchester Meeting 5th day morning but it is rather uncertain. The Meetings here yesterday were interesting to me from the presence of several Friends I had long had a desire to see. Edwd. Alexander, Limerick, Saml. Tuke, Wm. Allen and Peter Bedford. The 2 former I met in the evening after meeting at George Crosfield's, who kindly invited me to his house to supper. His wife is the Margaret Crosfield, whose severe remarks you will have seen recorded in the *Christian Advocate* if you saw the one I

<sup>1</sup> *An Affectionate Address to the Society of Friends in Great Britain and Ireland.*

mentioned to thee 3rd of this month, with an account of the M. Meeting at this place and the reception of a memorial from some Friends here of the name of Hodgson,—Brother and 2 Sisters—giving their reasons for sending in their resignation (they hold similar views to I. Crewdson). The Men Friends hesitated to read it fearing it might contaminate the minds of the youth, but it was read. Then they were hesitating whether it should be sent to the Women Friends. However, they had it, and after reading a part thought it too bad to proceed with. The sermons yesterday from E. Alexander and Wm. Allen bore rather strongly on the question in dispute amongst us. E. A. is rather a powerful Minister. The latter preaches what would be called a real Quaker Sermon, exhorting us to "dwell deep, seek to the light within," etc. S. Tuke is a very agreeable Friend. I had a good deal of conversation with him. His head is remarkably fine; I think the best and most strikingly so I ever saw. He told me "they hoped to be liberated before the end of the week but it was very uncertain," so I quite hope to meet W. Forster at Manchester. He was at Bolton on 1st. day. I met J. Compton at Chester (a Manchester Friend, one of the Overseers and a friend of I. Crewdson). He told me the Committee had sent I. Crewdson a sort of written accusation containing 8 different points, which I. Cn. had very clearly and fully answered, shewing them wherein he thought Friends were erring, but written in a truly Christian spirit. I can hardly tell thee of the feelings that occupied my mind after taking my seat in Meeting yesterday morning and seeing one Friend after another that had taken an active part in these persecutions, filling the highest seats in our Synagogue. . . .

I was up early this morning and bathed with C[harles] Gilpin, after which we went over the water about 3 miles hence and breakfasted with J. Robinson Pim, an Irish Friend well known as principal manager of, I suppose, nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  the Steam Packets in the Kingdom. He has a very nice house and garden, reminding me of some of the pleasant houses at Falmouth.

James Clark had been apprenticed in, and then became partner in, the Sheepskin-Rug factory founded ten years earlier by his brother Cyrus. Charles Gilpin, for long M. P. for Northampton, who helped J. C. over his report of the Manchester episode, was apprenticed to his father in Bristol. The two cousins were from boyhood much together. When apprenticed both were short of pocket money. So they devised a plan by which J. C. would make, from odds and ends of the rug material, brown sheepskin slippers lined with lambs-wool, which his cousin was to sell in Bristol. They caught on so well

that from this originated the large boot and shoe factory (now C. & J. Clark, Ltd.) at Street. The rug business is now Clark, Son and Morland, Ltd., Glastonbury.

James Clark as traveller for the firm, went into all parts of the United Kingdom, and seems to have been most kindly welcomed by Friends everywhere. Even when in his nineties, he often recurred to the mixed experiences of those strenuous days, but always with a note of thankfulness to the kind-hearted hospitality by Friends on these journeys. Frequently he spoke in this respect of Isaac Crewdson. Hence the Manchester episode was of double interest to him. Plainly he did not take I. Crewdson's standpoint, but he strongly shared the very prevalent feeling among many younger Friends, that what took place was persecution. Among the many who then left the Society in consequence were three or four of my Mother's brothers, sons of William Stephens, of Bridport.

I have included a good deal of the "setting" of the more essential extracts, as helping to form the picture of events.

*Asgarth, Purley.*

J. EDMUND CLARK.

### Swimming against the Stream

"Look at that man swimming (said a gentleman to his companion, as they stood above Putney Bridge) did you ever see the like? he is swimming against the stream. I will bet you a guinea he is a Quaker, for none else would swim against the stream." The other replied, "As you cannot possibly know that circumstance of a naked man, I will bet you a guinea that he is *not* a Quaker."

They waited until he came out of the water, and dressed himself, and as his appearance did not confirm the conjecture of the challenger, he told him in a polite manner of the wager depending, and begged him to decide it; to which Sylvanus Bevan with great good humour replied, "Notwithstanding my appearance with respect to dress, I belong to the Society of Friends and the reason of my swimming against the stream was this, —finding it running strongly, I had the curiosity to try if I had strength sufficient to make way against it, but was only able to do it for a short way, as you might observe."—From *Records and Recollections of James Jenkins*.