

London Yearly Meeting, 1836¹

Extracts from letters of John Southall (1788-1862), of Leominster, to his wife, Hannah, daughter of John Burlingham, of Worcester. Contributed by John E. Southall, of Newport, Mon.

For Beaconism in the country, see xvi. 129.

7th Day evening 5/21, 1836.

MY letter sent to-day brought up my narrative till I went to meeting, and I now, before retiring to bed, commence a brief account of further proceedings at the Committee.

I return to events passing here. Several subjects were discussed of some interest—Tithes ; plain dress ; Field Sports ; receiving back money in part of goods seized and sold for Church Rates, etc. ; Love and unity ; The period for which the spring queries are prospective. I spoke briefly on the three last questions, and acquitted myself so that I have no reason to regret what I said : I was once refused to speak by the Clerk, J. J. Gurney. There was so great a desire to cut short the discussion and I fear in some degree to confine it to distinguished men.

The Beaconites preach up “ charity ” so exclusively, so deceitfully I fear, and received so little notice in reply, that I had for some time wished to avail myself of an opportunity of noticing it, and it being much easier to speak in the smaller than the large meeting house I availed myself of the occasion of “ love ” being brought forward by J. Hodgkin and others to say—“ I hoped it would not for a moment be supposed that, that Love or Charity which was so emphatically recommended by the Apostle Paul, was intended to promote any compromise of principle, on the contrary it appeared to me that the truest charity was perfectly consistent with indignation against wrong principles or practices.” These are nearly, but I think not quite the words I used. No reply was attempted.

At $\frac{1}{2}$ past seven the meeting terminated when Edward and I took a walk in the Circus, called on H. Thomas with whom I dine To-morrow and may perhaps go in the afternoon with Edward to see John Barclay, but this must depend upon Edward². We drank tea at Circus Place in company with Robert Charlton of Bristol, who appears a nice simple and clever young man but labouring under disadvantage from Beaconite associations. He admired W. Bolton's³ speech very much, but seemed very uninformed respecting the Controversy, truly indeed it is to be lamented that such young men's faith in the doctrines of the Society should be shaken by such associations and that insidiously.

I forgot to say that on Brother Richard [Burlingham] having said that he had in possession a book written against our principles, Luke Howard expressed a suspicion that his work "The Yorkshireman" was intended by Br. R. L.H. repeated his enquiry, but so far as I understood got no satisfactory answer from Br. R. I should have said the book was specifically devoted to the subject of dress and address.

Brother R. mentioned it in our General Meeting. I know not what publication it is.

Second day morning. Having breakfasted I proceed to relate the few events of yesterday.

I attended Gracechurch meeting in the morning. There was no minister in the higher place. After an hour's silence a woman friend spoke very suitably, expressing her apprehension that some would be disappointed at seeing "no preacher there," and followed by strikingly pointing out the advantages of true silence. The only other address was delivered in sitting and on these words—"I am in the Father and the Father in me. Learn of me although I am Temporally poor I am spiritually rich through the holy ghost that dwelleth in me." It was either the address of a deranged person or of one who wished to treat our principles with ridicule. I am inclined to think the latter, but perhaps Edward will be able to obtain some information on this head from the Elders of that meeting.

I dined very comfortably at my friend Henry Thomas's. At 3 o'clock I went to Circus Place which is very near,

and at 4 set out with Edward to walk to Stoke Newington. When we arrived at John Barclay's we found so many friends at tea that it appeared difficult to obtain any conversation with him. He was however very pleasant, but his knee no better, it having been rendered worse through his going to London to attend the meeting of Ministers and Elders.

I delivered thy message to him and he invited us to come again. His wife was very kind and enquired particularly after thee. We then went to meeting where we had some addresses from women friends and a long and striking communication in defense of our principles from Wm. Allen. I afterwards walked with Joseph Cooper and his newly married wife to their house quite in the country and a beautiful place. I was exceedingly sorry to find J. Cooper⁴ completely changed from our recollection of him. He seemed to have a very uncomfortable feeling towards W. Allen, and represented that Friends entertain the principles they hold, not so much from enlightened conviction as from a blind reverence for their predecessors.

I, of course told him that my views were completely of an opposite character from his, and I doubt not the argument would, however unwillingly on my part, have been continued for a considerable time longer, if it had not been quite time to proceed towards London. J.C. enquired after thee, and said "he should much like to see thee again." He was very pleasant and kind, but his altered views are no doubt ascribable with those of many others, to too much association with the worldly, the rich and the great.

We supped at Circus Place. Eliza [Hunts⁵ née Southall] as I said before is most kind and cordial in her manner, although she cannot agree with my views on "Truth Vindicated,⁶ etc.," but however unpopular and however terrible those views be in the opinion of J. Forster and S. Tuke, I more and more think that without adopting them it is impossible to make any palpable and recognised distinction between those who desire to preserve and those who wish to destroy the Society.

I believe that the Society has all along recognised the Scriptures as by far the most valuable collection of

inspired writing that ever came into the world, and being inspired they cannot err. They are further inexpressibly important as containing the record of the Saviour; but do they not limit the divine power who admit that they are the *only* collection of inspired writings that ever has been or ever will be?

2nd day night. "The great and important day" has passed over. Both Friends and Beaconites appeared in full strength at Meeting. I never saw so many together, particularly in the evening and we have had two sittings of 4 hours each. The subject had scarcely commenced before we received a note requesting a visit might be allowed by women friends. Luke Howard opposed it with much warmth, saying had he been aware beforehand of the improper nature of Sarah Grubb's⁷ visit and that she would have used intimidatory and denunciatory language he would have walked out of the meeting. He was seconded by W. Ball,⁸ but without success.

The friends were introduced and proved to be M. Tanner⁹ and Ann Jones.¹⁰ Their sermons were as opposite in character as darkness and light. M. Tanner recommended charity, forbearance, conciliation. Ann Jones began to speak when L. Howard looked round sternly and angrily and if Wm. Forster had not tapped him on the shoulder, I think would have risen. A. Jones spoke with some degree of agitation, laying much stress on the incumbent duty which she could not refuse. She said and repeated—"I warn you who are opposing the Light. The Lord hath a controversy with those who oppose the divine principle in the heart, but especially with those who want middle measures in other words to promote a compromise." Her communication was interesting to me, but not very long.

Immediately on the women friends retiring, Luke Howard called upon the clerk for their names and called them out publicly "for the information of friends." The Westmoreland proposition was then read. The discussion continued through the two sittings. The longest speeches were from J. J. Gurney and Josiah Forster, both of whom were for a middle course. On the whole the affair terminated satisfactorily, as it has proved that both amongst great and little there is a feeling against

an organic change. Upon the whole tolerable order was preserved.

Rutter of Shaftesbury¹¹ characterised Ann Jones's sermon as "blasphemous" on account of its high assumption of Spirituality. It was finally concluded not to enter the Westmoreland proposition on the books, but (to conciliate) it was agreed that the sub-committee on the General Epistle should be directed to prepare a paragraph expressive of the high value of the Society for the Scriptures.¹² Seeing the absolute inefficiency of a compromise, two friends having spoken against it, I ventured with much difficulty to say from the gallery—"I hoped the minute prepared by the clerk would not go forward, for I was satisfied it would neither please friends from Westmoreland nor those of a different way of thinking." However, it passed, though many influential friends who said they did not approve of it, did not like to object. I dined and drank tea at Circus Place. J. Sturge is now in this room at the Guildhall talking to Peter Clare¹³ a Beaconite friend of Manchester.

Perhaps I have hardly done justice to Josiah Forster, his speech was decidedly on the whole favourable to Quakerism, but J. J. Gurney still appears, in my view, very ill to correspond in principle and profession with our Society. He said unless the Society, in his belief, acknowledged the principle that the scriptures were of greater authority than impressions received into our own minds, he would instantly leave the Society, persuaded that such an opinion led directly to Deism.

I fear I have not told thee what the Westmoreland proposition was, it was merely "that the society should put forth a declaration that in their estimation the holy Scriptures are the paramount rule of faith and practice." Thomas Frankland's¹⁴ was the best speech on the conservative side that I heard. He said that the real question was not exaltation of the holy scriptures, but the exaltation of the human interpretation of the scriptures, in short to bring the Society under the ban of the Theologians.

A number of Manchester Friends, chiefly Beaconites, are now at this house. I am sometimes amused and sometimes tried by their whisperings which I hear. They

are, I presume from their conversation, of the destructive party come up expressly for the occasion.

3rd day afternoon. Having dined with Joseph Sturge I proceed to finish my letter before meeting. The sitting this morning was occupied by a long and tedious discussion on the report of the Lancashire Committee, which was very general, not at all entering into details. I do not know that it was worth while to report any of the speeches, indeed there is not time but the proceedings being reported in "The Christian Advocate"¹⁵ which I intend to bring with me; my memory will be refreshed on my return. A speech of J. Sturge's pleased me. He recommended conciliation and that the differences existing should not cause any separation in social intercourse. At dinner I told him (with my reasons) that I thought this was impossible. I have not time, however, to explain further. I should have said that the committee was reappointed.

Remind me, when I return, to relate to thee what Luke Howard said on the evil influence in the Society of Woman's Meetings being established. It will no doubt however be published in "the Christian Advocate," but I have not time further to advert to it.

NOTES

¹ For another account of this Y.M., written by Jonathan Grubb, see *F.Q.E.*, 1895, pp. 99-120.

² "Edward, mentioned as calling on John Barclay (1797-1838) with my grandfather, was his brother, Edward Prichard Southall (1792-1878). He travelled as companion to John Wilbur when the latter paid an acceptable visit to the Yearly Meeting in 1832." J.E.S.

³ William Boulton lived at Manchester. "He was a merchant and had a warehouse somewhere about Peel Street . . ." (vol. v., pp. 18, 20, 21; xvi., 121, 130). He was called "one of the great leaders of Beaconism" (*Letters of William Hodgson*, 1886, p. 158). He seceded, with numerous other members of Hardshaw East M.M. (*The Crisis of the Quaker Contest in Manchester*, pt. iii., 1837, pp. 5-10).

⁴ Joseph Cooper (c. 1800-1881) was a son of Daniel and Elizabeth Cooper. He was a hat manufacturer in London and lived at Essex Hall, Walthamstow. In 1836 he married Margaret Lister, of Bradford. Children and grandchildren are known to us. He was much interested in the anti-slavery movement and wrote on the slave trade in Africa. He also wrote a pamphlet—*Water Baptism and the Last Supper viewed in Relation to Ritualism*, 1876, which went through several editions. He was an active Friend of liberal views.

⁵ Henry Hunt (1780-1862) was a son of George and Ann Hunt, of Hallen in Gloucestershire. He was apprenticed in London. In 1804 he removed to Bristol (original certificate in D.) and in the same year he married Ann Marshall, of Evesham (-1825). In 1829 he married Martha Towill, *née* Ash, and in 1834 Eliza Southall (1791-1874), daughter of John Southall (primus), of Leominster (1759-1825).

J. E. Southall adds :

"John Wilbur was on friendly terms with Eliza Southall, who afterwards married Henry Hunt, and who, I regret to say, so far permitted adverse influences to enter her mind, in after years, as to burn John Wilbur's letters. One to my uncle, is, however, preserved. I came to reside in Bristol as a youth in 1872, and my aunt sat at the head of the Meeting on the womer's side. I recollect laying before her my perplexity on finding out the difference between J. J. Gurney whom I had been taught at Bootham almost to reverence, and Sarah (Lynes) Grubb, whose letters I read at that time, receiving from them a deep and lasting impression. My aunt's reply was indecisive, she thought that great allowances should be made for each of them.

"Seeing my great uncle by marriage, Henry Hunt, is among my earliest recollections : but I remember more of the colour of his drab gaiters, as he sat in Meeting, on the same form as my father and myself, if I recollect right, than I do of his features.

"When a boy at Ackworth School, one of the tasks assigned to Henry Hunt was copying out Job Scott's farewell letter to his family. J.S. died in 1793, so that H.H. would be then thirteen. His daughter, Ann Hunt [1810-1897] was perhaps one of the loveliest characters that have belonged to Bristol Meeting for a long period. I knew her both in Bristol and at Leominster, and looking back, time has rather increased than diminished the fragrance of her memory, altho' I consider that a bias towards Gurneyism lessened the value of her influence."

See Friends' Registers ; *Annual Monitor* ; *Balkwill Genealogy* (typescript in D.) ; *Memorials and Letters of Ann Hunt*, by Matilda Sturge, 1898.

⁶ *Truth Vindicated, being an Appeal to the Light of Christ Within . . . by Way of Answer to a Pamphlet, entitled "Extracts from Periodical Works on the Controversy amongst the Society of Friends,"* by Henry Martin of Manchester, London, 1835, 224 pages ; second ed. 1836, 275 pages. The author writes :

"Walking along the streets the other day, I saw a board hanging by the side of the door of a bookseller's shop, announcing that 'Extracts from Periodical Works on the Controversy Among the Society of Friends may be had within.' I immediately walked into the shop and purchased the little pamphlet."

J. E. Southall adds :

"Henry Martin, the author of *Truth Vindicated*, was a writer of some talent and spiritual discernment. At one time he resided in or near Welshpool, and it was there that my grandfather, who sympathised with his standpoint, called on him. *Early Friends and Modern Professors* was a later publication, intended as a castigation of J. J. Gurney. To express openly any appreciation of *Truth Vindicated* was to court the frowns of the rich and influential Gurney party. Samuel Tuke for one dissociated himself from any support of the work."

⁷ Sarah (Lynes) Grubb (1773-1842). See xvi. 95 and elsewhere.

⁸ William Ball (1801-1878) was the son of Richard and Elizabeth Ball, of Bridgwater, Somerset. The profession chosen for him was the legal, but "as the fortunate one among many who sought the hand of

Ann Dale in marriage, he became placed, through her ample fortune, in circumstances of independence" (*Biog. Cata. Lond. Fds. Inst.*). Ann Dale (1790-1861) was the sole survivor of the family of Robert and Mary Dale, of Tottenham. W. and A. Ball became members of Kendal M.M. in 1836, having a beautiful home in the Lake District, and also a town house at Tottenham. Rightly to estimate the character of William Ball would require more space than can here be given to it.

The late John Handley wrote of him :

" William Ball was rather peculiar but very clever on disciplinary matters and often put the meeting right. I remember at his house at Tottenham, being surprised at the style at dessert. When the wine bottles were produced, he said, ' Now I know some of my friends are teetotalers. I tried it for nine months and nearly killed myself with it ' " (*The Friend* (Lond.), 1912, p. 9). He travelled as a minister throughout the British Isles.

⁹ Mary Tanner (1792-1869) was daughter of Edward and Mary Gregory, of Yatton, and wife of Arthur Thomas Tanner, of Sidcot. She travelled extensively as a minister. " Many old Sidcot scholars have testified to the benefit they have received from her simple and eloquent sermons . . . her tender appealing ministry " (Knight, *Hist. of Sidcot School*, 1908).

¹⁰ For Ann Jones (1774-1864), see especially xiv. 70.

¹¹ This was, doubtless, John Rutter, of Shaftesbury (1796-1851). He was a bookseller and printer and later studied law. " He was disunited from the Society about the time of the Beacon controversy, but continued to attend the meetings of Friends " (Smith, *Cata.*). Most of his topographical works are in D.

See *D.N.B.*

¹² There is a long paragraph on the Scriptures in the Epistle of 1836 — " there can be no appeal from them to any other authority whatsoever " — " whatsoever any man says or does, which is contrary to the Scriptures, though under profession of the immediate guidance of the Spirit, must be reckoned and accounted a mere delusion. "

¹³ Peter Clare (1781-1851) was a watchmaker, of Quay Street, Manchester. " He always wore black Kerseymere breeches and silk stockings to match " (v. 23). A portrait of this Friend is to be seen in the Friends' Institute, Manchester. His father, Peter Clare (c. 1728-1799), was also a watchmaker, but the son was the more prominent man. He was a bachelor. See *Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers*, by Britten, 1911, p. 636.

¹⁴ Thomas Frankland lived at Liverpool (xv. 143, 144). He corresponded with William Hodgson of Philadelphia (*Memoirs of William Hodgson*, 1886, p. 25).

¹⁵ The religious press gave considerable space to the Beacon Controversy (see note 6). *The Christian Advocate* was strongly pro-Beaconite, and information of Y.M. matters sometimes reached it surreptitiously (*London Y.M. during 250 Years.*). The editor appears to have employed a reporter to attend Y.M. (*Letter addressed to the Christian Advocate*, by O.T.R. (Thomas Gates Darton), Ipswich, 1836).

Information respecting the management is much desired.