

Rochester School

THE account of his schooldays written by Charles Tylor, which appeared in a recent issue (xvii. 1-19), has evoked considerable interest. We print below further information which has been sent us and hope for more.

Samuel J. Alexander, of Bournemouth, writes respecting William Alexander : " He was a foreman in a Government ship-building yard at Rochester—a good position, but, accepting Friends' principles, he gave this up and applied for membership, but it was then found that he had a right of membership¹ but I have never ascertained who his parents were. His son, William, founded the Lombard Street banking and bill-broking business."

S. J. Alexander sends up to be added to MSS. in D a letter from Thomas Marsh, of Chatham, dated 9 mo. 11, 1785, addressed to Robert Fowler, of Melksham, of which the following is a copy :

" Esteemed Friend,

" There being a Vacancy for a Schoolmaster at Rochester by the Decease of our Fr^d W^m Alexander, wish the Intelligence to be extensive. A Description of the Situation and Circumstances may give thee an Idea what Person might be suitable for that Station. The School stands in a very pleasant and retir'd Situation just out of the Principal Street, there is a good Garden and Play-ground &cc. the House well calculated for Accommodations, it being fitted up for that Purpose, and established by the late Master about ten years, the School is in a very thriving Way at this Time, having Twenty-six Boarders (mostly Fr^{ds} Children) besides a large Day-school of about fifty Boys, and some Girls which attend at Noon, the Friend has left a Widow and six Children grown to Men's and Women's Estate, three of the Daughters are at Home employ'd in the Family instead of hiring others to do the Household Business. It is the Widow's Request (and desire of the Fr^{ds} here) that the School may be kept forward for Her's and Family's Benefit, if a suitable Master can be obtained to support it with Reputation. 'Tis proposed Part of the Business on such Terms as may render it a comfortable Livelihood (the School at present is under the Care of the Usher) and the Children's Parents are willing they shall stay a little while till public Information can be given to endeavour procuring a suitable Substitute.

" I think the Business I am engaged to write about will need no Apology for my addressing thee in this Manner ; at the same time the Urgency of the Case will shew the Expedition required in making the Matter known, which submit to thy Care and Attention, requesting an answer as soon as consistently can. In the Interim

" I remain with Love thy respectful Fr^d

" THOMAS MARSH.

" N.B. The Fr^d departed this Life the 3rd Instant in good esteem, and was buried the 7th at Rochester."

¹ He was born in 1735. Formal membership was defined in 1737, see *London Y.M. during 250 years.*

The condition of the School at the end of the eighteenth century, when Richard Low Beck (1792-1854), of Dover, was a scholar, is described in *Family Fragments*, by William Beck, privately printed in 1897, chap. iv.

“ Boys in olden time may have left School early, but they often began its experiences when but young in years, and Richard Low Beck had scarcely seen five summers before he was sent from home to a Friends' school at Rochester, kept at that time by William Rickman, who had succeeded to it on the decease of Wm. Alexander. The seven years thus spent were not in this instance productive of much educational advancement, for too little effort was given to awakening an interest in learning, and much school time was wasted in concealed play, whilst the absence of organised games out of doors left the lads so restless, that runaway scenes were of frequent occurrence. In such cases the boys would mischievously say that ' Billy,' their master, was in no hurry to pull on his ' war boots ' for pursuit of the fugitives, since by giving them a good start he had all the more pleasure of a country ride in a Post-chaise at no expense to himself, for the cost attending these escapades was sure to be found an item in the school bill. Peaceable and peace-loving himself, there was too much general enthusiasm for the noble art of self-defence in those warlike times for its boyish practice to be excluded even from so Friendly an Establishment as William Rickman's, and there were not wanting retired places in the playground where a lad could prove his prowess in fistic encounters that placed him higher in the estimation of his school-mates than any success in learning. In this way Richard would hint that he had gained a better standing than might have been expected either from his age or stature, arising no doubt from the early development of nervous and muscular power, which made him in after life, whilst far from being a large man, superior to most in bodily activity and endurance.

“ As one of those to whom Friends at that time committed the care of their sons for education, it would have been interesting to learn somewhat of William Rickman's qualifications for such a position, but it appears that little is now known of his parentage or early life, except that he was a country lad, born in Hellingly, a small village of Sussex. He was educated at the Friends' School and Workhouse in Clerkenwell, London, and emigrated to New York when fourteen ; here he served an apprenticeship of seven years, and after some business experiences of no very successful character opened a School, but when still a young man returned to his native country, and for a while acted as superintendent of the Friends' School at Clerkenwell, from which he went as before mentioned to Rochester.

“ When over seventy years of age, he paid a religious visit to Friends in America, and his antique appearance was long a familiar object in the Ministers' gallery at the Annual gatherings of the Society in London, where he seldom took much share in the deliberations, but in his latter years would solemnly rise at its close to bid his Friends farewell, as if that were the last occasion on which he would have the privilege of meeting with them. Mistrustful in this respect as to the strength of his

natural constitution, he was ninety-three years of age before the end came to which he had thus so often made public allusion. He passed the closing years of his life in a house at Rochester, where his daughters kept a School, and it is pleasant to find him alluded to in a published memoir of one of their pupils, as having been regarded by them as a 'sweet spirited gentle old Friend, whom all the girls loved and honoured.' "

For William Rickman (1745-1839), see vols. 13-15, esp. 13; also Corder's *Memorials*; *Irish Friend*, iii. 39; *British Friend*, vii., viii.; *Friend* (Lond.), 1908, p. 585; Testimony, MS. in D.

Sir Rickman Godlee writes :

The interesting references to Rochester School in the first article in your last number tempt me to send you the three following extracts from the correspondence preserved by my grandfather. They give a peep at what was taking place there at the end of the eighteenth century, and supply a good illustration of the formal relations which existed between Quaker parents and children a hundred and twenty years ago. If you think your readers will care to see them please print them in your next number.

In the little pocket-book diary of my great-grandmother, Mary Lister, for 1798, the following entry occurs twice, on February 21st and July 17th: "Wm. Rickman dined and our Joseph went with him to school." Wm. Rickman was the master and our Joseph was Joseph Jackson Lister, my grandfather, then aged twelve. On March 15th we find: "My husband went to Rochester with W. Savory & M. Loyd," and on September 11th: "I slept at Rochester."

Joseph Jackson Lister remained one year at this school before going on to Thomas Thompson's school at Compton. One of his letters only has been preserved :

"Rochester, 7 mo. 23rd, 1798.

"Dear Mother

"Expecting that thou wilt be pleased to hear from me I may now inform thee that I arrived here safe. As the price of Drawing is now advanced from 15s. to a Guinea p. Qr. occasion'd by the small Number of Boys employ'd therein, thought it best to let thee know it. I hope to receive a Letter from thee soon: when thou writest to Father please to give my Love & Duty to him, my Love likewise to Sister and accept the same thyself from

"Thy dutiful Son,

"JOSEPH JN. LISTER.

"Master desires his love."

A prim formal letter for a boy of twelve.

In my "Life of Lord Lister," I have quoted most of a long letter, dated 14th of 8th month, 1798, from John Lister to his son. Here is the solemn conclusion :

"I had the satisfaction of meeting our valued Fr^d Solomon Chapman & Wife at Buxton making something of a circuitous Journey on my return.

“ Thou may remember how S.C. had to mention on taking leave his hope that thou mightest be favoured with a visitation of divine love and by obedience thereto experience a satisfaction beyond anything that this World can afford. This is the earnest desire of thy dear Mother and myself for thee, as everything here is changeable, and our acceptance with our great Creator the only foundation for true happiness both here and hereafter. Our Fr^d, S.C., was something better than when in Lond^o but purposed staying 3 or 4 weeks at Buxton for his health. He enquired very kindly after thee. Thy dear Mother and Sister join me in endeared affection who remain

“ Thy affectionate Father,
“ JOHN LISTER.”

The education at Rochester cost £20 per annum. French was two guineas extra and Drawing apparently £3. Here is a quarter's bill :

“ John Lister		To William Rickman.	Dr.
1798.			
7 mo.	18	To Cash Coach fare &c. from London	0 7 0
8 „	28	„ 1 Clarke's Exercise	0 2 4
	29	„ Cash paid cutting Hair	0 0 3
9 „	10	„ 1 Copy Book	0 0 9
„	21	„ 1 Copy Book	0 0 9
	29	Pens, Ink and Pencils ..	0 1 3
		Use of Books in School Library	0 1 3
		Extra wash ^s & mending Stockings	0 3 6
		Cash p ^d 11 weeks spending money	0 1 10
		Do. p ^d mending clothes and Shoes	0 7 3
		1 Q ^r Board & Education at £20 p. Ann ^m	5 0 0
		French at 2 G ^s extra	0 10 6
		Temporary advance as before	0 10 6
			£7 7 2

“ Please pay the Am^t to W^m Dollin when convenient after deducting the wine and spirits. [John Lister was a wine merchant.] I returned the 2 Hampers with empty Bottles. Joseph & y^e 2 Becks continue well except that Richard's ² Cough continues rather troublesome.

“ With kind respects to Self and Wife

“ I remain,

“ Thy Fr^d.

“ W. RICKMAN.”

About the same time that Charles Tylor's reference (p. 5) to the transfer of sums from slate to book reached our readers, we received in the J. J. Green Collection a book of copied sums written by Joshua Green (1813-1894) when at R. L. Weston's School, about 1826.

² Richard Low Beck—see *ante*.