

# The Third Marriage of William Allen, F.R.S., 1827

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**I**NFORMATION respecting the marriage of William Allen with Grizell Birkbeck and the feeling aroused in many minds by the proposal thereto has been accumulating in **D.** and may here be referred to as an episode in the life history of a well-known Friend and a side-light on the various views of Friends in the early nineteenth century respecting marriage.

William Allen (1770-1843) married firstly, in 1796, Mary Hamilton (1771-1797), who had an only daughter Mary (1797-1823). He married, secondly, in 1806, *s.p.*, Charlotte Hanbury (1762-1816); and, thirdly, in 1827, *s.p.*, Grizell Birkbeck (1757-1835), who was the second wife and widow of Wilson Birkbeck (1754-1812), of London, and daughter of Samuel and Grizell (Gurnell) Hoare, of Stoke Newington.

Concerning ourselves with the third nuptials, we read in the *Life of William Allen* (ii. 437) :

About this period he mentions in a letter to a friend that a new epoch was opening in his eventful life. For years, he and Grizell Birkbeck had been upon terms of friendship ;

“ It was not, however,” he writes, “ till after I lost my beloved child who was, as it were, my last earthly prop, that a more intimate union than that of friendship opened to my view ; and now the time appears nearly come for its completion. . . . Should this step appear singular let it be remembered, that the dispensations through which I have had to pass, have been singularly afflictive.”

The proposals referred to here appeared more than “ singular ” to many Friends up and down the Society.

The following letter will declare the matter. It is from John Grubb, husband of Sarah (Lynes) Grubb, to his brother Joseph, of Clonmel :

Chelmsford 22<sup>nd</sup> of 1 mo. 1827.

Dear Joseph,

. . . . .

The report about William Allen and Grizell Birkbeck intending to marry each other has been confirmed, but they did not pass the monthly meeting on the day first spoken of ; the matter had been kept very private, and when it was divulged, it caused such a general sensation, or as a friend said in a letter, such an *Explosion*, and I believe general disapprobation, that the ardour of the Lovers seemed rather checked, and they let *that* monthly meeting pass over without publicly declaring their intentions. G.B. has several nieces (daughters of the late Thos. Bradshaw, who lived near Belfast), whom she has reared and educated from Children, I believe, and are like her own Daughters (having no child of her own). I understand they were much hurt when they heard of the matter, but that things have since been arranged to their satisfaction ; the great agitation seems to have a good deal subsided, and I suppose the (not *young*) Couple will proceed at next mo : meeting—I have heard of two Women friends thrown ill in consequence of hearing of it. I apprehend, from what I consider pretty *good* authority, that the Bride elect is in the 70th year of her age—her Admirer is thought to be not more than in the 58th year of his age.

. . . . .

I am thy affect. Brother

JOHN GRUBB.

Shortly after—6 ii. 1827—the same correspondent wrote :

If thou knew the torrent of disapprobation that W. Allen & G.B. intended Match has excited in this Country, probably thy astonishment might be even greater than it now is. When thou goes about to *defend* the matter, perhaps thou hadst better not bring G.F. & M.F. [George Fox & Margaret Fell] as an example of the propriety of this case. I believe the former, at the time of their marriage was about 45 years of age & the latter about 54—very different from 56 and 70, so the cases are not at all similar.

It was not Sus<sup>a</sup> Corder or Eliz<sup>th</sup> Dudley that were so deeply affected with this matter, but two married Women, Mothers of families, well acquainted with W.A. & G.B., and who wish well to the reputation of the Society & the consistency of its Members.

We have seen a Copy of Verses written on the occasion, which has been printed in this new way called *Lithography* & circulated in various places. It is very severe, entitled *Friend-ly Scandal*. G.B. has a great property ; it is said about £3,000 a year.

The report having reached the South of Ireland, Mary Watson wrote off at once to G. Birkbeck :

Not believing the report respecting my much valued friends W.A. & G.B. I discouraged its circulation as derogatory to both, & forebore any

THIRD MARRIAGE OF WILLIAM ALLEN 31

expression to either of them on the subject, deeming it unnecessary—but contrary to my expectation and hope it appears now too much authenticated to leave room for doubt and it seems as tho I could not rightly refrain from attempting to add my mite in that scale wherein I must believe much weight has already been thrown by the friends attached to both parties and to that precious Cause which I cannot doubt they have been called & qualified in their respective measures & stations to advocate. My dear friend G.B. long known and loved I have rejoiced in thy preservation & increasing dedication & usefulness.

Heartfelt would be my sorrow should any thing be permitted to obstruct that usefulness or obscure the brightness of that example which I believe has been productive of benefit to many. My highly esteemed friend W.A. stands in a still more awfully conspicuous point of view not only as a minister in our own Society but the more public Theater of the world as an active promoter of religious & moral rectitude among man. Anything like a swerving from consistancy in his steppings might extensively opperate to retard that work, whereunto he was seperated & has been made instrumental in promoting. It would afflict me, that from any cause the weight of his services should be lessened ; in this land, where he has so recently & acceptably laboured, I am jealous lest it should be so, the rumour exciting general regret.

Suffer me then, my dear friends, to entreat your renewed close investigation of the subject in sincere desire that by the wittnessings of that light, which is the true light, you may be enabled to discover the enemy, if he has been permitted to approach you in this way to detect him in his transformations, resist him in his insinuations & become strengthened to turn from those things which tho they may appear lawful, nevertheless may not be expedient for you. I cannot conceive, my dear friends, why you should not continue to enjoy the benefits & comforts of religious & social intercourse & fellowship as you have done for some years, independent, especially at thy time of life, of any view to a closer union. I have no objection to thy communicating the whole or any part of this to W.A. & hope by both it may be accepted as a proof of deep and sincere regard

& attachment wherein I remain thy affec<sup>t</sup>

friend, M.W.

Grizell Birkbeck replied :

Stoke Newington 2<sup>nd</sup> mo. 12<sup>th</sup> 1827.

My dear Friend,

I have many times thought of taking up the pen to acknowledge thy kind letter, but have hardly felt strength to enter upon the subject, but we have for so many years known & loved each other, that I am not easy to pass it over in silence if it were only to tell thee that I accepted it as a token of thy affectionate solicitude on our account for which I am obliged.

My dear Friend has entered so fully into our views and circumstances in reply to some kind letters sent us by our honourable & highly valued friend Sarah Grubb that I think I cannot do better than refer thee to

that letter which thou mayest probably have already seen & if not, I have no doubt she will willingly communicate, and I may now add that after weighing the matter as well as we were able, we concluded it best to declare our intentions at our Monthly Meeting last fourth day, and with Gratitude & thankfulness to the Author of all Good I may acknowledge that I thought we had a favoured Meeting, in which my beloved cousin Anna Braithwaite was engaged in Solemn Supplication, John Shipley pretty largely in testimony, Sarah Harris shorter, all very acceptably, and I.S. paid a very satisfactory visit to our women's Meeting afterwards & my mind was clothed with precious calm & peaceful feelings, and however different the opinions of some of our friends may be from our own, the affectionate interest that many have evinced has been very gratifying, & I hope that nothing will diminish that love which I so highly value, & in the the feeling of which I subscribe myself

thy affectionate Friend,

GRIZELL BIRKBECK.

P.S.—Cousin W<sup>m</sup> Allen desires his d<sup>r</sup> love to thyself, & thy daughter & my Nieces, who are at home, request to unite with me in the same message.

Mary Watson, Waterford, Ireland.

The marriage took place on the 14th of Third Month, and William Allen took up his residence in his bride's house in Paradise Row, Stoke Newington.

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In the *Life and Letters of Maggie Benson* (1865-1915), London, 1917, there are two references to Friends :

Page 239. Haslemere, 17th July, 1897. "I think we may take a very charming house near here. It's compounded of two old houses, a Quakers' meeting house, a small farmstead, partly turned into school-house and part gymnasium."

Page 340. Falmouth, 26th Feb., 1905. "I like the Quakers so much ; I have been to their meeting this morning ; and also round Mr. Fox's garden and had robin after robin told to come to my hand for crumbs ; each eyed my fur coat, and obeyed his voice."

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**FRIENDS AND ROYALTY.**—In the life of *Alice, Grand Duchess of Hesse*, London, 1885, p. 126, we read : "Our Quaker acquaintances have sent me a great deal for the Bazaar, and an old gentleman who heard of it, too. I could not believe my eyes. They are always so generous ; and, hearing of my undertaking a work of this sort, they sent me this spontaneously. Is it not kind ?"