

London Yearly Meeting, 1838

LAST year we printed (vol. xvii., pp. 82-89) an account of Y.M. 1836, written by John Southall (1788-1862), of Leominster, to his wife, Hannah, daughter of John Burlingham, of Worcester. We now present further notes from the same Friend of Y.M. 1838, which give a report of remarkable addresses delivered by Sarah Grubb during the course of the proceedings.

7th Day Evening, 6mo. 3. 1838.

My last account was I think, brought up to 4th day evening or rather afternoon. I cannot very well recollect what passed at this distance of time at the evening sitting.—I think it was occupied by reading papers from the Select Meeting; and afterwards, at the Large Committee, where I was present, the new rules respecting Marriage as connected with the new Registration law were discussed.

It appears that the alternative in the law has in some instances proved troublesome to friends, in as much as the female friend giving twenty-one days' notice of an intention of marriage, has sometimes found it necessary to appear in person before the registrar.

Next morning, 12 o'clock, being appointed for Sarah Grubb's meeting with men friends (10 o'clock for that of woman friends) . . . the Committee sat two hours. The principal subject was one which had been previously discussed in the Y.M., "the municipal declaration and the suitability of friends acting as magistrates."¹ Several members of our Society who had swallowed the declaration, and one who was acting magistrate (Edward Backhouse), were present.

The skill, the sophistry, the eagerness to speak again and again to the exclusion of others—in this small body was remarkable, and they were joined by some from whom better things ought to have been expected; nevertheless, I think if the meeting had been polled, nearly nine out of ten would have decided that no friend

could honestly take the declaration. John Pumphrey is one of those who see no objection to it.

Sam Lucas², a very clever man, not I suppose quite a "friend" in all respects, made a very clear and forcible speech against it.

A Committee was appointed to draw up a minute of "Caution" on the subject, into which Committee, alas, several of the interested got.

The result was a tolerably good minute, barring some equivocal phrases, but not at all going beyond the negative standard, *i.e.*, not going nearly so far in plain speaking as the petition to Parliament which we noticed when presented.

At 12 o'clock we found the women friends were still occupying our Meeting House. S. Grubb not having yet released them.

It was quarter to one when our meeting settled down and we broke up at quarter to 3. S. G. is altered in appearance, she is much, very much thinner, but her eye has its wonted brightness, her manner is lively and her voice good, her address was perhaps even more than usually plain spoken, though it was not such as ought to have given offence to a single human being.

She spoke of the time of trouble to our Society as near at hand, if not as already begun. She denounced more strongly the pharisaical spirit, the disguised pride, the fair covering of external devotion, than the infirmities of human nature. She said we were still "in the mixture" and until we come out of it, the society could never shine in its proper brightness. She dwelt strongly on the feelings excited in the community by seeing that friends come up so little to the true standard, but the Almighty will have a people sanctified unto Himself, and if the members of our society draw back He will call in others professing their original principles. Look at the contrast between the early friends and their modern descendants. The first repudiating the fear of man, and even when imprisoned in noisome dungeons amongst the filthiest of mankind, singing praises to the God of their salvation.

Then came the age of formality, and now we have the age when the Society is suffering from riches of its

members, when men pursue money-getting as if it were the very end and object of their existence.

Oh! the deadening and darkening influence of the money getting spirit! Ah! though you may be the richest body in existence, for your numbers, will your wealth save you, or avert the displeasure of an offended God? Ah! no, I fear the contrary. Look at the grave and influential amongst us, alas! It is these that like false shepherds have caused the sheep to go astray.

After adverting to the blessedness of entire dedication of heart in its eternal consequences, she concluded by an aspiration of praise, most beautifully expressed in a strain highly melodious.

I forgot to mention the high ground of divine inspiration which she (I doubt not with authority) maintained and that at one time she said: "I feel that a disposition exists in this room, to oppose and reject what I say. You may perhaps be thinking it is only a poor, insignificant woman who is telling you what she thinks, and you will not receive it, but it is not the instrument, but the power from whom the words proceed that ought to be looked up to and assuredly it is not safe to condemn the divine Power."

After she had taken her seat, she rose again repeating emphatically: "farewell," "farewell," and with some little addition concluded, and the meeting soon broke up. It was worth a journey to London to participate in the feelings excited by this address,³ to one fully convinced as I am that true Christianity as professed by the early friends is founded upon an immutable rock.

I could not but rejoice to hear it thus set forth in truth, and simplicity, and can I be blamed as a lover of immutable justice and I trust a friend to my fellow men, if I do rejoice in it even though bowing under the weight of my own omissions and commissions and their consequences.

Of course the above cannot be considered a report of S. Grubb's address. I have merely put down as well as I could, a very compressed abstract of a long and valuable discourse.

At dinner at Bro. Hunt's there was a table full of friends including Cousin M. Bradley.

In the evening several epistles passed the large committee. Next morning we were in committee till 11 o'clock. The routine business of the meeting afterwards proceeded without much debate. Epistles occupied the Committee at night.

Next morning the minute on the "declaration" passed thro' the Committee, also the General Epistle, a long and wordy document but containing some good points and striking exhortations. Josiah Forster said to be the author.

NOTES

¹ This subject was brought into prominence by the recent passing of two Acts (1 Vict., c. 5, and 1 Vict., c. 15) and the Y.M. of 1838 sent out a long minute on the subject, citing some of the "difficulties to which Friends are liable in taking office in Municipal Corporations and also accepting Magisterial and other offices under the Crown, more especially with reference to one of the declarations," though a form of affirmation was provided for "the people called Quakers." Friends were "affectionately, but earnestly cautioned" against accepting office.

Edward Backhouse (1781-1860) is cited as one of the Friends who had "swallowed the declaration." Another early holder of the office was Samuel Hayhurst Lucas (1786-1873) (son of Samuel and Ann Lucas of Westminster), of whom, in this special connection, there is a record in the *Annual Monitor* for 1874. Weighty Friends were uneasy as to his position—Peter Bedford wrote to John Hodgkin (then Junior), 20. 4. 41 :

"I duly received thy kind note mentioning thy endeavour to meet our friend S. H. Lucas, who is now one of the Justices of the Peace for the County of Surrey, at my house. He sent his carriage to the rail road Station to bring thee here but as thou came not with it he went off in a haste by the next train to London, and I advised him to call upon thee, which I found he has done.

"It is pleasant that apart from each other, we have similar views and sentiments on the subject.

"To me it is evident that the subject had claimed our friends very serious consideration, and I do believe he is desirous to acquit himself in the station conscientiously as a Friend, and that where our religious principles are likely to be compromised, he will decline to act" (from original in D). The changed attitude in the Society towards civic work is remarkable. In 1916, Isaac Sharp compiled a list of 110 Friends holding the office of J.P. (MS. in D), and a report to the Y.M. of 1921 gives the figure as 107, six of whom were women.

² Probably, Samuel Lucas (1805-1870), the artist, of Hitchin, who shortly after this painted a number of prominent Friends of the early nineteenth century, sitting in Y.M. See frontispiece to *London Y.M. during 250 Years*.

³ Compare "My friend W^m Casson, of Thorne, is the Friend concerning whom Rob^t Charleton said it was worth coming all the way from Bristol to Ackworth to hear his offering in prayer, and his exhortation, in the *prayer meeting* held there at the Gen^l Meet^g time."—HENRY HOPKINS to J. and E. Green, 8 x. 1865.