

“Strift”

The discovery of the Quaker use of this word in an earlier surrounding than hitherto found has aroused a fresh interest in a word about which some discussion arose, as we remember, some years ago. This discussion reached the ears of the editor of the *New English Dictionary*, for we read, *s.v.* Strift :

“ The word seems to have survived to some extent in the traditional religious phraseology of the Society of Friends; the use of it in the Epistle of 1893 gave rise to much discussion.”

The use of the word is traced in the *Dictionary* from early times to the year 1710, from which date it was said to have been lost for a hundred years, until revived by Joseph John Gurney in 1815 in the words “ in the *strift* of death,” and again, “ a period of some *strift* and loss ” (*Memoirs*, 1854, i. 107, 374).

The last utterance of Elizabeth Fry (sister of J. J. Gurney) contains the word—“ Pray for me. It is a *strift* but I am safe ”—in 1845. The Epistle for 1893 contains : “ Take comfort from the thought that others have passed through as great a *strift* and have come forth into peace and happy trustfulness.”

The appearance of the word in the Epistle evoked an interesting discussion. Isaac Sharp wrote in *The Friend* (Lond.), 22 Sept., 1893 :

“ The use of the word *strift* in the Epistle has given rise to some controversy. The question has been asked by many whether *strift* was not, by a printer’s error, substituted for the word *strife* ; others have asked whether the word was a ‘ coined ’ word, formed on the analogy of gift, drift and similar words.”

In a letter to Isaac Sharp, Dr. James A. Murray wrote : “ The word is not current English and there is no evidence of its use in modern times.” He added that the word was used by writers down to 1710 in the sense of “ striving, earnest contention,” rather than that of “ stress, conflict, strife.”

It would seem as though the word had descended in the family of Gurney, for the earliest mention of it we have found is in the manuscript volume : *The Gurneys of Lakenham Grove*, compiled by Sir A. E. Pease in 1907. In a Testimony written in 1770 by Elizabeth (Kett) Gurney, to the memory of her husband, John Gurney (1715/16–1770), of St. Augustine’s, Norwich, we find : “ I was apprehensive he might have a *strift* at the last, . . . but it pleased Divine Goodness to favor him with an easy passage.”