

## An Old-time Quaker Stenographer

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**T**O students of the early literature of shorthand Laurence Steel is known as the compiler of one of those crude little manuals by the aid of which seventeenth century youth—though of the “meanest capacity”—was invited to acquire the art and mystery of stenography, and which have, for the most part, passed with their authors into oblivion.

The author of *An Historical Account of Compendious and Swift Writing* (1736), Philip Gibbs, in the course of a rather lengthy notice of Steel's shorthand treatise, observes: “This Author's Book, tho' but little known, is well worth any one's looking into.” And James Henry Lewis, writing of the same work some eighty years later, in his *Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of Stenography*, goes so far as to call it “the most curious, and perhaps the most valuable Stenographic production of the 17th Century.”

As to Steel himself, Gibbs states: “I am credibly informed that he taught School at Bristol.” To this meagre scrap of information nothing has been added by later historians of stenography; Laurence Steel remained little more than a name until recognised and identified by the writer as one of the early disciples of George Fox—an active preacher and sufferer in the heroic age of Quakerism. An attempt is made in the following pages to set down such particulars as are recoverable concerning this early Quaker “inventor” and teacher of shorthand, whose brief career was one of more than common interest.

During the last three or four centuries the name Steel, or Steele, has been by no means of rare occurrence in England, and the forename Laurence, or Lawrence, is found frequently in conjunction with it. An important branch of the family settled at Sandbach, Cheshire, early in the seventeenth century, of which one member, William Steele, became successively Attorney-General of the Commonwealth, Recorder of London, and Lord Chancellor of Ireland. From the Lord Chancellor's brother Laurence, who was one of the Clerks of the Irish House of Commons from 1662 to 1697, the

Steeles of Rathbride, County Kildare, are believed to have sprung; and the name Laurence was borne by the eldest son of half a dozen generations of his descendants.<sup>1</sup> It is not unlikely that the subject of this monograph was connected with the Steeles of Cheshire, though proof is wanting.

Laurence Steel was born in or about 1644—the birth year of William Penn—when the nation was in the throes of civil war. He speaks of London as his native city. His parents were Independents, apparently in easy circumstances, and they dedicated him to the ministry from his birth, sparing no expense to give him a suitable education. Strong religious convictions early manifested themselves, and at the age of seven, he tells us, he would often leave his playmates for private retirement and prayer. When about twelve years old the boy was sent to school to complete his studies. There his precocious piety gave place to more natural feelings, for he joined in the sports and pastimes of his fellows with such zest that he “came to neglect the gentle motions of the Spirit of Truth within him.” After a period of severe mental distress, extending over many months, Steel took upon himself to reprove those who, as he considered, misspent their time in “worldly vanities,” rebuking relatives and strangers impartially.

Hoping to find a religious body with whom he could unite, he journeyed many miles in all weathers to attend various places of worship. At first he favoured those of the Presbyterian persuasion, but afterwards joined the Independents, among whom he seems to have preached. Becoming dissatisfied with their teachings, however, he expressed his views publicly in London. Hitherto he had scorned the Quakers, but now he sought out one of that community. As the result of a talk with a humble field labourer and his wife, the modest demeanour of the latter particularly impressing him, he decided to throw in his lot with the Friends.

On the following Sunday—or First Day, as he now styled it—he attended an open-air Quaker meeting, where, he

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Queries*, 2nd ser., xii (July 27th, 1861), p. 71; *Burke's History of the Landed Gentry*, 5th ed. (1871), vol. ii, p. 1312; J. P. Earwaker's *History of . . . Sandbach, co. Chester* (1890), p. 17 *et seq.* A Laurence Steele was Receiver of First Fruits and Tents under the Commonwealth, and died about 1659.

declares, "though few, if any words were utter'd, I felt that Presence and Power of God in which I had more Satisfaction than in my own Preaching and Praying." After this experience no time spent among these Friends appeared too long, and no trouble too great to get to the meeting, which was at some distance from his home. "The more I was acquainted with them the more I was united to them." One of the first Quaker preachers he heard is said to have been Henry Macy,<sup>2</sup> of Freshford, near Bath.

Declining public employment, Steel had some time previously accepted a private post with a Dorsetshire family, where he acted as chaplain and (for a yearly stipend) as tutor to the children. For a fortnight after his "convincement" Steel remained with this family, who treated him with every consideration, despite the odium which the name of Quaker brought upon him. His departure having then become inevitable, he was handed the sum due to him as tutor, but he would accept no reward for his services as chaplain, though "urged and pressed to receive it." Lest his action should be misconstrued, he drew up a "certificate" explaining the circumstances and handed it to the family.

This decisive event in Steel's life took place about September, 1673. His accession to the ranks of Friends was duly noted by their founder, George Fox, who writes in his *Journal*:

In y<sup>e</sup> yeere 1673 there is a preist whoe preacht for hire in Wiltsheree y<sup>e</sup> came to bee convinct of y<sup>e</sup> everlastinge Gospell & is become a free preacher of y<sup>e</sup> gospell & left his preachinge for hire whose name is Steele.<sup>3</sup>

Fox is less than just to Steel when he states that he had "preacht for hire," for it is clear that the latter was particularly sensitive on this score, and he distinctly asserts that he would take nothing from the Dorset family for his preaching, "which also I denyed in London."

On leaving this family we learn that Steel went to his Relations, who receiv'd him (though they were not Friends), and kept to Friends' Meetings, waiting in Silence for about Twelve

<sup>2</sup> "Henry Macy lived at Freshford in Somersetshire—travelled [as a Minister] in the counties of Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire—a man of a very meek, lamb-like spirit—was faithful to the last—laid down the body at a Friend's house in Wiltshire, 1680." See *Jnl.* ii. 87.

<sup>3</sup> *The Journal of George Fox, edited from the MSS.*, by Norman Penney (1911), vol. ii, p. 323.

Months, and then broke forth sometimes in a few Words of Prayer, and sometimes of Exhortation, and so grew and encreased in his Gift, till he had an eminent Testimony, and well accepted: he came afterwards and settled in Bristol, and kept school in the great Meeting House in the Friars, and was very Serviceable in that City and Country adjacent.<sup>4</sup>

The date of his appearance in Bristol is approximately furnished by the following entry in the minute-book of the Bristol Monthly Meeting of 27th April, 1674:

It being proposed to this meeting to Spare the Voyd Roome over our meeting house to Lawrence steele for a schoole Roome: This meeting doth with one accord give their concent that he shall have it to the vse proposed.<sup>5</sup>

The West of England Friends had already shown a practical interest in education by the establishment of schools. As early as 1669 negotiations were in progress with one John Toppin, who was offered £10 a year to teach poor children in Bristol; but it is uncertain whether he actually opened a school in the city. The meeting house in "The Friars" was not opened until 1670, and Laurence Steel appears to have been the first schoolmaster installed therein. In the absence of positive information, it is impossible to say whether instruction in shorthand formed a part of the curriculum; but from Steel's later writings it is evident that he had devoted a good deal of attention to the art, and, in view of his insistence upon its advantage to youth—*inter alia*, in the promotion of piety—it may be assumed that he would avail himself of the opportunities afforded by his position as schoolmaster to initiate young Quakerdom in the mysteries of "short writing." After the lapse of a year the school seems to have grown too large for the "Voyd Roome," and on the 19th July, 1675, accommodation was sought in the meeting room itself.

Lawrance Steele requesting us to lett him oʀ Roome on vacant Daies to use as a schoole Roome friends haue Concented that he may soe use it, pʋided he take Care the same be left Cleane & Descent for the use of friends on meeting days & such other times as friends shall signify occation.

<sup>4</sup> John Whiting's *Persecution Expos'd* (1715), p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. William Tanner's *Three Lectures on the Early History of the Society of Friends in Bristol and Somersetshire* (1858), p. 123; F. A. Knight's *History of Sidcot School* (1908), p. 4.

Soon after this Steel appears to have made his first venture in authorship. In the minutes of the Morning Meeting of London Friends is the following :

At a Meeting at James Claypooles the 31<sup>th</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> mo [*i.e.*, July] 1676.

A book of Lawrence Steeles being part read it was agreed that the book be laid by till he come to Towne and then Friends of this Meeting to speak with him concerning it & to give their reasons why it is laid by at present.

Doubtless this minute refers to a little pamphlet of twenty-eight quarto pages, published in the following year, in which some of Steel's earlier spiritual experiences are narrated, and from which the biographical details in the preceding pages have been largely drawn. It bore a portentously long title, couched in the figurative language characteristic of the primitive Quakers :

Jacob the Plain Man Wrestling with God until the Break of the Day, and prevailing in the Light thereof, for perfect Victory and Dominign over Esau the Rough & Cunning Man, And over all that would hinder him from going up to *Bethel*, the House of God, to sacrifice unto him in the Place where he first appear'd unto him. Whereby all may see, how I was after long Wrestling with, and seeking the Lord, brought off from Profession and Preaching that for Gospel which made not free from sin in this Life, that I might come to know the Light and Life of Jesus manifest in me for the Destroying the Works of the Devil, and giving Power to supplant & overcome all that would hinder from going up to the Mountain of the Lord's House to Worship and Serve him in the Life and Purity of his own Spirit, which is blessed for evermore ; Whose Outward Name is *Laurence Steel*. Printed in the Year 1677.

A second edition of this little piece of introspective autobiography, varying only in the typography, bears the imprint : " London, *Printed and sold* by Andrew Sowle, at the *Crooked Billet* in Holloway Lane, *near* Shoreditch, 1683."

From this time onward the name of Laurence Steel occurs frequently in the records of the Bristol Meeting, chiefly in connection with the preparation and reading of papers on questions of " discipline." On 25th March, 1678, he and two other Friends were deputed to draw up a paper with a view to preventing the " Inconveniency and Greife " caused by " some young people amongst us in their entangling their affections each to other in relation to marriage before they haue acquainted their relations therewith." On the 6th May following

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A paper of Advice to the youth of friends in this City & others concerned, in relation to marriage, was brought in & being to the Likeing of the meeting is desired that it may be subscribed by Tho: Gouldney Charles Harford Charles Jones W<sup>m</sup> fford Lawrence steele & Tho: Callowhill on the behalfe of this meeting who are also desired to procure the same printed for the more convenient spreading thereof & y<sup>r</sup> friends of this meeting will be at charge to take of 500 Copies.

Accordingly, there was issued a large quarto sheet, printed on one side only, which begins :

Unto the Youth of our Friends (called Quakers) in the City of Bristol, and elsewhere, And others who may be concerned herein. *To be Read and Practised in the Fear of God, in which it was given forth.*

The rest of the sheet is occupied with words of counsel for the guidance of Quaker youth in matrimonial adventures, and across the foot is printed :

Given forth at our Mens-Meeting, in the City of <i>Bristol</i> , the sixth day of the third Moneth, 1678. And at their appointment signed	} by	Laurence Steel,	Thomas Gould-
		Thomas Callow-	ney,
		hill,	Charles Harford,
		Charles Jones,	William Forde.

There is a copy of this broadside in the Library of the Society of Friends, Friends House, Euston Road, London ; the original draft, bearing the signatures of forty-two local Friends, being preserved in a volume of MSS. belonging to the Bristol Monthly Meeting. On the 17th of the next month, the papers having been printed and 500 copies duly delivered, "Lawrence steele is desired to Read one in o<sup>r</sup> publick meeting on first day," he and others being directed to "dispers as many as they may see meet to their Neighbouring friends and others."

Amid these many activities and the duties devolving upon him in connection with the meeting-house school, Steel had been applying his energies to the problem of simplifying the methods of stenography then in vogue and the preparation of a manual of the art embodying his ideas as to how it should be taught, with the result that in this same year appeared another work bearing the name of the Quaker schoolmaster, the title page of which announces :

Short Writing, Begun by Nature ; Completed by Art. Manifesting the Irregularity of placing the Artificial before the Natural or Symbolical Contractions ; And Proposing a Method more suited to Sense, and more

fully answering y<sup>e</sup> Requisites of a Compleat Character, in the shortning both of Words and Sentences. Invented, Taught & Published with Plaine Directions Examples and a Specimen of the Writing By Laurence Steel. Sold in Bristoll by the Author, & also by Charles Allen,<sup>6</sup> Bookseller in Broad-street of the same City; And in London by Benjamin Clark<sup>7</sup> Stationer, in George Court, Lumbard Street. And others. Printed in the Yeare 1678.

This title is engraved within a border of elaborate architectural design, at the foot of which is the legend: "Joseph : Browne : Sculpsit "; and the same name appears on the last leaf, under "A brief specimen of the writing," contained in a circle of minute dimensions.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the title-page and a page of introductory remarks, there are 19 duodecimo leaves, engraved on one side only, forming the text of the work, and each of these is divided into two columns, or "arches." J. H. Lewis described this book, in 1816, as being then extremely rare. "It is handsomely engraved, and presents in the neatness and distinctness of its execution, a striking and pleasing contrast to all preceding systems. This book," he adds, "is in every respect the most curious that can fall to the lot of a collector." The copy which Lewis possessed is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford: others are in the British Museum (with the autograph signature of Alex. Fraser, 1839); the Chetham Library, Manchester (formerly owned by John Harland); the Manchester Free Reference Library (Bailey collection); the Pepysian Library, Cambridge; the Earl of Crawford's

<sup>6</sup> Charles Allen was the publisher of a little volume of "poems and songs," some of them rather free, printed at London in 1674 under the title *Bristol Drollery*; and a number of sermons by local divines were printed for and sold by him between 1676 and 1681.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Clark—dubbed "thee-and-thou Clark" by John Dunton—was a printer and publisher of Friends' books from 1676 to 1682. A volume published by him in 1681 contains a list of "Books sold by Benjamin Clark, Bookseller in George-Yard in Lombard-street. . . . As likewise, Bibles . . . and School-books, and Stationary-ware, as Paper, Paper-books, several sorts of blanck Bonds, double or single, Letters of Attorney, and Copy-books of several sorts, and very good Ink, liquid or cake. Where you may have Books very well bound, and Money for old Books."

<sup>8</sup> The only other known work of Joseph Browne's appears to be a portrait of Richard Collins, "Supervisor of the duty of Excise in Bristol, &c." forming the frontispiece to the latter's *Countray Gaugers Vade Mecum*, London, 1677. This portrait is inscribed "Joseph Browne deli: et Sculp: 1676: in Tetbury." Tetbury is a small Cotswold town twenty miles north-east of Bristol.

Library at Haigh Hall, Wigan; and the writer's own collection. The two last mentioned are incomplete.

A later edition, of which the only known copy is in the Washington Library of Congress, was "printed and sold by T. Sowle, in White-hart court, Gracious Street."

In an "Explanation of the Title and Method" Steel remarks:

The Common Methods teach to write first by the Letters and Vowels Places, This is Irregular for the Reasons premised in the Four first Arches of the Book, and is apparently prejudicial to the Learners progress by disaffecting him at the first Entrance with the longest way of Writing, whereas he should have that to begin with which might take with his sense, and encourage him with alacrity to proceed. The onely way I Know of to effect this, is, First to instruct the Learner in the ready expressing of Words by their Natural and Proper Emblems, which ought to be ranked Alphabetically, and the Character for each letter prefixed. This is the Method that I have taken to Initiate and fasten Beginners.

In this profession of faith Steel wanders far indeed from the path of stenographic orthodoxy, and in subordinating a regular alphabet of consonants and a method of vowel indication to a more or less arbitrary symbolism he committed an error of judgment fatal to the success of his system in point of practical utility. He furnishes some curious examples of his "emblems" and continues:

By this Method those y<sup>e</sup> have learnt other Hands may greatly improve themselves. In short, The Book contains Three Parts, of which the Emblems are the First, The Second shews how words not Expressible by Emblems, may be Regularly and Concisely written. The Third teacheth a new Invention for the more effectual Contracting of Sentences like Words, In all which I have aimed at Brevity, Perspicuity, and relief to the memory by affecting the Sense and Reason. These Three Parts are included in 36 Columns in the Arches and Heads of which are Observations for the Learner first to peruse, and then to get the Characters in the order they are placed till the whole be finished. It may be dispatched in about a weeks time, but must afterwards be improved by daily and constant writing. The Psalmes of the Bible are fit to begin with. And in the writing let the letters be kept fair and distinct, and no long hand mingled with it. If any desire to be instructed in this Art, or to have further direction in it, they may hear of me at the Widdow Heli's upon the Wair in Bristol.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "Widdow Heli" is perhaps the Joan Hiley, Haly, Hely or Ely—the name is found with considerable variety of spelling—of Bristol, who was imprisoned in that city in February, 1681/2 (*Whiting's Persecution Expos'd*, p. 60). She was one of the ninety-four Friends who subscribed the wedding certificate of George Fox and Margaret Fell, and there is a

One expressive symbol by which the followers of George Fox were denoted in some popular shorthand treatises of the time—a *q* with a tremulous appendage—finds no place in Steel's list of emblems ; but with ready resourcefulness he has transferred the quivering tail to *d* and made it do duty for " drunkard " !

The worthy Quaker would doubtless have proceeded to develop the system further had not the course of events in the next few years forced him to give all his attention to matters of graver import. His friend John Whiting tells us that " he had many Meetings in my house at Naylsey, after I was a Prisoner [in 1679], and came once to Ivelchester with Samuel Jennings, to visit us, when I was carried thither " [in 1680]. The minutes of the Morning Meeting of London Friends held on the 22nd August, 1681, show that Steel was contemplating another publication about this time :

At a 2<sup>d</sup> dayes Morning Meeting y<sup>e</sup> 22<sup>th</sup> of y<sup>e</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> m<sup>o</sup> 1681 Lawrence Steel's book Entituled (Esau supplanted) was this Day Read And friends have some strait upon their Spirits at present, as to the Printing of it till L S be writt too about it, to know whether It hath been fully dealt with in the Case he Mentions before a Meeting ; Or in y<sup>e</sup> presence of ffriends, as to know before them Whether he would acknowledge his Weaknes as to his sudden leaving the Meeting at frinsaw [*i.e.*, Frenchay ?].

And friends think it best for L: Steele to Enquire yet of J. Story, whether he be yet Convinced & will Acknowledge his Weaknes, in so sudenly departing from the s<sup>d</sup> Meeting at frinsaw.

The book here referred to was apparently intended by Steel as a contribution to a bitter intestine controversy which was then agitating the Friends, and which centred round the names of John Story and John Wilkinson. These two Quakers were the leaders of a determined opposition to George Fox and his more prominent colleagues upon certain questions of Church government and discipline, which developed into a schism of some magnitude. They secured a number of adherents in the West of England, separatist congregations being formed in Bristol and other places. William Rogers, a Bristol merchant, used his position as one of the trustees of the meeting house to exclude Fox's followers

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record of a letter to her from Fox in 1678. She died in 1687. " The Weir," now greatly modernized, stood on the north bank of the Frome, and it was at this spot that poor women washed their clothes. Later it was divided into " Broad Weir " and " Narrow Weir," of which the former name alone survives.

for five years. As many as a hundred pamphlets were issued from the press in connection with this controversy, but it is probable that Steel's *Esau Supplanted* remained unpublished, for, in a letter addressed to George Fox later in the same year (1681), he asked that the MS. might be returned to him. This letter, the original of which is preserved in the Friends' Library in London, is here printed at length as a characteristic Quaker document of the period :

Dear G.F.

With dear Love to thee, as also the Love of faithfull friends, as Charles Marshal who is here, R.S.<sup>10</sup> R.V.,<sup>11</sup> C.J.,<sup>12</sup> C.H.<sup>13</sup> & their wives. These lines are sent to thee with the inclosed to answer the importunate pressing desire of an honest tender hearted yet weak woman, as to y<sup>e</sup> tenderness of whose spirit, & good conversation, we are well satisfied, though we could not close w<sup>th</sup> y<sup>e</sup> paper now sent as it is worded, or feel that thorow open guidance of the truth, so that we were unwilling to have it communicated any further, but rather advised to wait in y<sup>e</sup> motion of life, that it might bring forth what it moved for w<sup>th</sup> more clearnes & [soundnes ?] yet nothing will satisfy but she is in danger of running [into ?] an extremity of confusion & distraction if we did not hasten it away to thee, neither would she admit of that alteration or amendment of y<sup>e</sup> words as we could desire so y<sup>t</sup> I saw no way but to intimate my intention of sending it, upon w<sup>ch</sup> she hath had as she saith ease & satisfaction in her mind, so she leaves it to thee having a tender respect for thee that thou maist weigh & feel y<sup>e</sup> thing & order it as thou seest meet.

Friends here & in wiltshire are generally well and peacable, but here is so much filth & dirt & an ill savour doth rise up in this city through y<sup>e</sup> loosnes & unfaithfulnes of many of Professours of truth that doth load and grieve the hearts of y<sup>e</sup> upright, so y<sup>e</sup> is to be feared when all is sifted y<sup>e</sup> upright & sincere botomed will come into a narrow compasse. We see to our grief the fruit of y<sup>e</sup> long indulged loose libertine spirit, which gods people will never have that ease & opennes in their spirits till it be removed. Bristol is like to be a place eminent for persecution w<sup>ch</sup> ripens more & more ; though we are little troubled with any oppositions or clashings in our meetings.

I would willingly hear from thee concerning J.S.<sup>14</sup> letter w<sup>ch</sup> he sent me & since Friends think fit to reserve the printing of what I sent up to them for a more convenient season, I desire that it might be sent to me. John Bringhurst<sup>15</sup> ye Printer may send it among Friends Books to R.S.<sup>10</sup> So w<sup>th</sup> dear Love being unfit to write by reason of pain & weaknes in my head

I am Thy Loving Friend L.S.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Snead.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Vickris.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Jones.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Harford.

<sup>14</sup> John Story.

<sup>15</sup> John Bringhurst was a printer and publisher of Friends' books from 1681 to 1685. He resided first at the sign of The Book, in Grace-church Street, but in 1683 he removed to The Book and Three Black-Birds,

The back of the letter bears the direction : " These To be left w<sup>th</sup> Benjamin Antrobus<sup>16</sup> at y<sup>e</sup> plow & harrow in Cheapside : or at william Meads<sup>16</sup> in Fenchurch Street For G. F. London " ; and it is endorsed in Fox's own handwriting : " larence Steel of bristo with aleter to the king 1681."

This epistle, written in a remarkably clear and legible hand, evidently accompanied a paper submitted by the Bristol Friends for Fox's approval. Steel's prediction that Bristol would become notorious for persecution was not long awaiting fulfilment, for in that very year (1681), and for some years to come, the dissenters of that city—and more especially the Quakers—were assailed with vindictive violence, the ringleaders in most of the outrages being John Knight, sheriff, Ralph Oliffe, alderman, and John Helliar, attorney and town clerk. A minute of the Men's Meeting held on 12th December, 1681, shows that the Friends were already alive to the need for taking precautions against attack :

It is the desire of this meeting that the little dore belonging to the meeting house be not bolted but kept only under latch untill the 2<sup>d</sup> houre in the afternoon that soe friends may not be hindred from coming in that way vntill the second houre then to be lockt.

Lawrence steel hath undertaken by some one of the famely belonging to the house to pforme it viz to set by the dore from the first houre to latch it if left open vntill the 2<sup>d</sup> houre and to Attend also after the 2<sup>d</sup> houre with the Key keeping it lockt, to lett out only those who may haue occation to goe forth who shall not pmitt any of the Rude boys to goe Rambling.

But their enemies were not to be thwarted by so simple an expedient, and only two days later, on the afternoon of 14th December, Helliar the attorney, three members of "y<sup>e</sup> Artilery Company of Militia officers," a number of constables, and "a large train of Rabble & rude Boyes, most of y<sup>m</sup> known to be y<sup>e</sup> Scum and Rascality of y<sup>e</sup> Town," came to the meeting-room on the pretext of levying a

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in Leaden-Hall-Mutton-Market, between The Black-Bull and Colchester-Arms, " where any person may be supplied with Printing, books and paper as formerly." Bringhurst suffered imprisonment and the pillory for printing George Fox's *Primer* in 1684, after which he is said to have fled to Holland.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Antrobus and William Meade were London linen-drapers and well-known Friends, the latter sharing with William Penn the honours of the famous trial at the Old Bailey in August, 1670.

distress of £5 "for not sending a Souldier to muster." This sum they demanded of Laurence Steel, "who dwelt in a Tenement over y<sup>e</sup> Meeting room," and as he did not immediately comply, the seats and forms were seized, galleries torn down, windows smashed, and the place rifled "w<sup>th</sup> great violence, the Rabble carrying away much of y<sup>e</sup> Spoil."

An appeal to the mayor brought only a temporary cessation of the attack, for the mob returned and not only rifled the meeting-room a second time, but "also went upstairs to y<sup>e</sup> tenement of Elizabeth Bathoe & Laur Steel, and there began spoil also by throwing down a b[e]d & some other household goods into y<sup>e</sup> Meeting room," altogether doing wanton damage to the value of £30, which represented a good deal more at that time than now. On subsequent occasions the meeting-room and tenement were again plundered, the school benches and forms, chairs, and "a Table of y<sup>e</sup> School-room" being thrown downstairs by the infuriated mob.

Some illuminating details of these unprovoked assaults are to be found in a little pamphlet entitled *The Distressed Case Of the People called Quakers in the City of Bristol*; and further particulars are supplied by a contemporary MS. belonging to the Bristol Friends' Meeting, in the form of a statement drawn up by the sufferers for submission to the King and Council, imploring "some Ease and Relief towards us his well meaning and peaceable Subjects."

From this time forward the Bristol Quakers were the victims of continual persecution. Their meetings were brutally disturbed, their property damaged, and heavy fines imposed, many families being utterly ruined in consequence. They were crowded into prisons until there was no more room to receive them, and at length, remonstrances proving of no avail, Laurence Steel and Charles Jones, jun., travelled to London with the express purpose of interviewing the King and laying before him their grievances. In the metropolis they were joined by another Friend, George Whitehead,<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Whitehead was one of the most prominent of the early Quaker leaders, and it is interesting to know that his wife (*née* Anne Downer) was an accomplished stenographer. Writing of his imprisonment in Launceston Gaol in 1656, George Fox notes in his journal: "Wee sent for a younge woman one Anne Downer from London y<sup>t</sup> coulde write caracters to gett & dresse our meate & shee was very serviceable to us." This bald and breathless sentence was punctuated and slightly expanded

who has left an account of the episode in his *Christian Progress* :

Being willing to assist them what I could in Sollicitation, as I was deeply and compassionately affected toward our said Friends, when I understood their extream suffering Condition, I acquainted some of the Lords of the Privy Council, as *Prince Rupert*, the *Lord President*, and *Lord Chancellor*, with the case ; and desired we might be heard before the King and Council the following Council-Day, which was granted us ; *Prince Rupert* and the *Lord President* appeared most compassionate and tender toward our suffering Friends, when they understood the Extremity of their Sufferings, and the *Lord Chancellor* moderate ; so that he granted beforehand that we might be heard before the King and Council, which I greatly desired.

Accordingly, on the next Council Day, 17th February, 1681/2, the three Friends were admitted to the royal presence. "Some Question arising about taking off their *Hats*, the Clerk of the Council, *i.e.*, Sir Thomas Doleman, came to the door to take them off, but was forbidden, 'twas said by the King, so they were concluded to come in before the King and Council with their *Hats on*, which they did accordingly." Whitehead was the chief spokesman on behalf of the oppressed Quakers, but Steel gave his testimony as an eyewitness of the insults offered to and the cruel wrongs inflicted upon himself and his comrades in Bristol ; and laid upon the Council table a detailed statement of their case.

We complain [he said boldly to Charles and his ministers] of the Havock and Spoil made upon the Freehold and Tenement, and breaking open Closets, Boxes, etc. . . . We complain of the rude Multitudes haling and tearing Women's Cloaths, and offering shameful Incivilities to them ; also their pulling an innocent Man's Coat off his Back, and taking Money out of his Pocket.

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by Thomas Ellwood, the first editor of the journal in 1694, who states (doubtless from personal knowledge) that Anne Downer "could write and take things well in short-hand." The daughter of an Oxfordshire vicar, she was the first woman Quaker to preach publicly in London, and in this connection it is odd to find Quaker preachers of the softer sex singled out as exceptionally rapid speakers in a shorthand treatise of the time.

"The fluentst sermons word for word wee Reach  
Though utter'd faster than shee Quakers preach,"

exclaims one of the polished rhymsters whose verses adorn Nathaniel Stringer's *Rich Redivivus or M<sup>r</sup> Jeremiah Richs Short-hand Improved*, first published about 1677. Hen. Care, the writer of these lines, may probably be identified with the journalist of that name of whom Anthony Wood—who calls him "a snivelling fellow"—gives some account.

But Whitehead adds: "Of this, though he had more to speak, they seemed not willing to hear it."

For three quarters of an hour these three indomitable men stood and pleaded before the King and Council, with their hats on their heads, and it is said that Charles appeared somewhat affected by what he heard.<sup>18</sup> At the same time a statement was handed in to the Council headed "A Brief Abstract of the suffering Case & Humble Request of the afflicted people called Quakers in the city of Bristoll," signed by Whitehead, Steel and Jones, the two latter subscribing themselves "Citizens and Inhabitants of Bristoll, who are come on purpose to seek Relief in the Case."

As a result of this petition, an order was granted on 15th March, 1681/2, signed on behalf of the Privy Council by Sir Thomas Dolman, directing the magistrates of Bristol to inquire into and redress the "Streightness and Noysomness of the Prison of Newgate," of which complaint had been made. On the following day this order was despatched to Bristol Friends with a covering letter from the three suppliants, and four days later the mayor and aldermen of the the city directed "that Bridewell be added and made a Goale to accommodate such Prisoners as are supernumary, and can't be conveniently kept in the said Goale of Newgate."

The effect of this order, however, was very partial and transient. However well disposed he may have been towards his Quaker subjects, the "merry monarch" was far too indolent and *sans souci* to pay more than passing heed to their appeals for redress. Some of the incidents that followed are vividly described by the pseudonymous writer of a tract entitled *More Sad and Lamentable News From Bristol, In a Sober letter from a Gentleman of that City to his friend in London*, "London, Printed for John Moderation," which is dated from "Bristoll the 19th of April, 1682." He declares that the meetings of all the dissenters "continue to be disturbed with equal vigour as formerly," and that the Quakers were forcibly kept out of their meeting-house, holding their meetings in the court adjoining. He relates how, on the previous day, a number of constables, accompanied by several fiddlers and a drummer, well supplied with food and liquor, had taken possession of the meeting-room and, having freely imbibed there, "went upstairs to the

<sup>18</sup> *Christian Progress of . . . George Whitehead* (1725), pp. 504-513.

tenement of a late Widdow, and there at the top of the House they sung, made *Huzza's*, and Revelled till about three in the Afternoon." He further describes a raid on the house of a Friend "against whom these Blades have an Inveterate spleen, in that he was one that went to *White-Hall* to complain of their Illegal proceedings, this they manifest by enquiring every Meeting day after him, and menacing how they would manage him for his Petitioning."

The object of these vindictive demonstrations appears to have been Charles Jones, jun.; but there can be no doubt that Laurence Steel also was singled out as one to be molested whenever opportunity offered, on account of the active part he had taken in seeking redress at the hands of the King, and his sufferings were soon to reach a climax.

On September 18th, 1682, Steel was himself made a prisoner in Newgate, Bristol, "for meeting," and in a list drawn up in the following November his name occurs as a prisoner in the "Chapell Chamber" there, with twelve other Friends, one of them a boy of fifteen.<sup>19</sup> Towards the close of 1683 he was again imprisoned under the Conventicle Act, for six months, and was exposed to the most barbarous treatment at the hands of the gaoler, Isaac Dennis. The details of the sufferings of Friends imprisoned at Bristol are so voluminous that one account alone extends to fourteen folio pages, and a number of pamphlets were issued by the Quakers themselves in which their grievances are set out at length. One of these is entitled :

A Narrative of the Cruelties & Abuse Acted by Isaac Dennis Keeper, His Wife and Servants, In the Prison of *Newgate*, in the City of Bristol : Upon the People of the Lord in Scorn called *Quakers*, who were there Committed for the Exercise of their Consciences towards God. With an Account of the Eminent Judgments of God upon Him, and his End. Published for a Warning to others, by some of those people who were Sufferers under him.

On the last page this little *brochure* is stated to be "Published by the Sufferers themselves, from Newgate Prison in Bristol, the 6th of the 12th Moneth [*i.e.*, February], 1683/4." Some of the statements in the pamphlet are attested by Steel, amongst others, and the following will serve as a specimen of their tenour :

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Besse's *Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers* (1753), vol. i. pp. 66, 67.

The 23<sup>th</sup> Instant [January, 1682 /3], *Margaret*, the Wife of *Jo. Heale*, being taken very Sick to the 26<sup>th</sup>, and then being near departing out of this Life, *Lawrence Steel* and *Paul Moon* desired to go and visit her before she dyed, she being a Prisoner in the same Prison with them, but was denied by the Tapster, he saying, *That his Master Isaac Dennis would not give leave* ; this piece of Cruelty we think cannot be parallel'd in this Age, that Friends and near Acquaintance should be denied to see each other before they dye, especially being Fellow-Prisoners. Witness, *L. Steel, P. Moon, J. Cowling, M. Jones, R. Parker.*

Margaret Heal succumbed two days later, and John Whiting, who frequently visited the prison, relates that four others—two men and two women—died for want of air and room.

When Steel was released from his six months' confinement it was with a constitution, which had never been strong, greatly weakened and impaired. He was no longer able to attend the meetings of Friends, but grew gradually weaker, and soon after his liberation from gaol he died, a martyr for his faith, at the early age of forty. John Whiting has left on record, in his *Persecution Expos'd*, some interesting personal details relating to the Quaker-stenographer :

About this time [1684], our dear Friend Lawrence Steel, of Bristol, died, though not in Prison ; yet not long after he was released. In a Sence of the Loss of whom (being one I dearly loved, and was well acquainted with) I writ a few Lines as a Testimony concerning him, which I shall now somewhat enlarge (for the Respect I had to him) chiefly out of his own Account.

He proceeds to recount some of the particulars of Steel's career set out in the foregoing pages, and concludes :

He was a comely Person, but pale Complexioned, being inclined to a Dropsie, and infirm as to his Health, which no doubt was heightned, and his Health impaired by his close Confinement in *Newgate* ; and did not live long after his Releasement (at the End of six Months) but died of a Diabetis, about the tenth (being buried the 12th) of the eighth Month [*i.e.*, October], 1684, laying down his Head in Peace with the Lord.

He was a Man of grave solid serious Deportment ; of a sweet even Temper and Disposition ; of a sedate retired Life ; and very Exemplary in his Conversation, in which he walked as a Stranger and Pilgrim on Earth, but hath finished his Course, and kept the Faith, and receiv'd the Crown of Life ; and hath left a good Saviour behind him ; of whose Sincerity and Integrity to God and his Truth, I could write much, but his innocent life and Testimony, is the best Memorial of him, and his Memory is blessed.

That Laurence Steel was not without means is clear from the fact that he left £120—no inconsiderable sum in those days—to be disbursed among the Quaker poor and Quaker prisoners of Bristol. This bequest is recorded in the minutes of the Bristol Monthly Meeting, 1684, in the following terms :

I give and bequeath to my loving friends, Charles Harford, Richard Snead, John Love, and Thomas Callowhill, the sume of One hundred and twenty pounds, to be by them layd out in the purchase of land or else by way of loan ; and the improvement or increase either was made of the 120<sup>lb</sup> to be payd to the use of such poore of the people called Quakers in the Citty of Bristoll ; and my will is that the moiety or halfe part of the income or increase of the said 120<sup>lb</sup> be divided amongst the prisoners of the said people, if there shall be any, at the discretion of my well respected friends above named, the said Charles Harford, Richard Snead, John Love, and Thomas Callowhill ; and the other moiety or halfe p<sup>t</sup> of the p<sup>f</sup>itt or yearly income of the said 120<sup>lb</sup> to be dellivered into the Weomen's Meeting of the said people called Quakers, to be distributed to such as shall be judged most indigent, especially such as are disabled by sickness and weakness from the reliefe of them selves and poore famelys ; as to the disposal of the last moiety, my will is that Hannah Jordan, Bridget Snead, Elizabeth Dowell, and Hannah Callowhill be joynt overseers with the said Ch. Harford, Rich. Snead, Jno. Love, and Thomas Callowhill—as to the performance of this my said Guift. And my will is in case there be noe prissoners on the truth's account of the said people in the said City of Bristoll, then the said first moiety be distributed amongst such nessessitiary friends of the said Citty as shall be judged most meet by my said friends, Charles Harford, &c, or such as they shall successively committ the care of this my Guift unto, and none others.

The money was first lent out at interest in 1685, and afterwards invested in the building of the Friends' Workhouse, erected in 1698, on which it was secured by way of mortgage with other legacies by deed poll dated 25th September, 1701. Steel is said to have made his will whilst in gaol, but no authority is cited for the statement. He was succeeded at the school in the Friars, about 1690, by Patrick Logan, who was recommended by Paul Moon as "a good scholler & an apt schoolmaster to Instruct Youth in Latten, &c."

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