

Friends and the Emperor Alexander

LETTERS FROM THOMAS CLARKSON¹ TO HIS WIFE

London Monday Morning
June 20, 1814

My dearest Love

Finding that after 12 o'clock I shall be at the West End of the Town on a Committee and that I shall not return till 9 or 10 at Night I am willing to catch a few minutes to write to you before I set off. And first about the Emperor Alexander. The Quakers about 3 days ago waited upon Count Leven, the Emperor's Ambassador, with their Address, begging that they might be allowed to present it to his Master. The Count read it before he would undertake an answer. The address was very short stating a few of y^e main Principles, but beautifully drawn up. There was not a word too much nor a word too little. It breathed also a Spirit of Piety, and discarding all Temporal Matters wished the Emperor all spiritual Good. The Count was much struck with it, and said the Emperor had never seen such an address in his Life, and y^t an answer should be returned to it by nine at night. Accordingly at that Hour precisely a Note arrived, of which the following is a Copy: "The Quaker, M^r Allen, is desired with his 2 friends to attend at the Pulteney Hotel on Saturday at 9 at Night." Accordingly they went then. The Emperor was at that time at the City feast, but they were shown into a Room, and splendid footmen and splendid Squires were running to and fro. Foreigners came in occasionally and sat down and went out, some of these Army officers, and others of other sorts. At length they waited till half past 1. in y^e morning, but no Emperor: about this time Count Leven's own servants departed, and seeing this, W. Allen & his friends went away, desiring these servants would tell y^r Master, that he, W. Allen, w^d call upon him (the Count) at 9 o'clock at his own House in Harley Street.

¹ Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846), of Playford Hall, Suffolk, was the noted anti-slavery advocate and writer, also historian. See *Journal*, vols. iii.-vi. ix. x. xv. **xxi**.

Accordingly he set off at 8 yesterday (Sunday) Morning, but could get no Coach & the Rain came pouring down in Torrents, so that he was obliged to take Shelter in Alleys &c. At length he found a Coach but when he arrived in Harley Street it was not till half after 9 and the Ambassador was gone. The Porter however told him, that his Master had been anxiously expecting him and that he w^d return at ab^t 11 o Clock. He was then shoun into a Room in the Ambassadors House. At 11 o Clock Count Leven drove up. The Bell rang and W^m Allen was sent for out of y^e House to the Coach door. The door was opened & the Porter put him in with the Ambassador, who galloped off with him full speed, not giving him time to discharge his (W. Allens) Hackney Coach. They travelled with great Velocity, till he was taken to a street which he never recollects to have seen in his Life before, and where about 200 Carriages were standing : nor does he know at this Moment where or what the Street was. They went into a Room. The Ambassador then said that M^r Allen must take the Emperor to the Quakers Meeting. W. A. replied y^t it was then $\frac{1}{4}$ after 11 & that every Meeting in the Metropolis w^d be over by 12, but that in the afternoon the Emperor might have his choice of Meetings. The reply was y^t the Emperor was engaged all the afternoon and must go in the Morning or not at all. The Ambassador then left the Room to speak to the Emperor, who desired W. Allen to be informed that he w^d dress himself in 10 minutes, not exceeding it, and so to the nearest Meeting House, & take his sister with him. This was Westminster Meeting in S^t Martins Lane. In about 8 minutes the Ambassador on receiving a message, went to his carriage and W. Allen followed. They were to drive to y^e Meeting and the Emperor to follow ; The Ambassador who sat with W. Allen had a sword on, his coat full of stars, and fine plumes in his hat.

They had no sooner landed out of his carriage than the Emperor and his sister accompanied by the young Dukes of Oldenburg and Wirtemberg were ready to land from theirs. This being accomplished, W. Allen was desired by y^e Ambassador to lead the way. This he did and y^e rest followed. When the meeting door was opened they weresitting in awful silence. W. Allen placed the Emperor and also his sister and the others in suitable places and then sat down. The

religious silence lasted about 15 minutes, and all the foreigners seemed impressed. At length Richard Phillips rose up and preached about 5 minutes & very well. Then in about 5 minutes afterwards John Wilkinson of High Wycomb, who preached for about 15 minutes. Then John Bell of Oxford Road [? Street] who preached for about 2 minutes only. John Wilkinson is the Person with whose Preaching your father was once so well pleased. The Emperor seemed greatly interested by it, looking up several times to the Preacher, and his Sister so much so as to be nearly at Tears. At length the Meeting broke up : but no one knew all the time (but W. Allen) that it was y^e Emperor who was there.

On breaking up W. Allen recommended the Meeting to go out first, and as they went out to make a sort of Lane in the Court from the Door towards the Carriage. This was done. It was then known that it was the Emperor who was to pass through them. William Allen was desired as before to lead the way to the carriage. He himself had not all this time exchanged a word with the Emperor. He advanced accordingly, and then the Ambassador, and then the Emperor and his sister, both of whom were pleased with the silent, orderly, and decorous conduct of the Congregation, who when they knew him did not shout like other People and make a wild Noise. At length they began to pass through them, but not without manifesting their respect and Esteem for them. The Emperor and his sister shook hands with almost every individual, man, woman, and young Persons whom they passed, and expressed at times the gratification they had had on y^e occasion. At length the Emperor before he lifted up his foot to the steps of the carriage seized the Hand of W^m Allen, which he held for some time very feelingly thanked him for the Pains he had taken, and wished to see him, and desired that he would come to the Pulteney Hotel on Tuesday at 10 in the Morning and instead of coming with the deputation (for he disliked parades), that he, W. Allen would bring with him that good man who had spoken second for that he wished to converse with both of them privately on the subject of their religion. Thus poor John Wilkinson who is a modest and rather timid Person, is hooked in—unexpectedly—into Converse with an Emperor. The Emperor then got into his Carriage. By this time he was recognised by the People, who began to shout and huzza as

before, exhibiting a striking contrast between the 2 Kinds of People.

You may read this Part of my Letter to your father, and I think, if you were to read it to Martha Brewster she would feel herself much obliged to you.

farewell. most affectionately thine

T. C.

[Address] Mrs. Clarkson,
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

Copied from the original at Friends House.

25 June 1814.

My dearest Love

I am now up at 6 in the Morning, though I did not get into bed till two just to steal half an hour to write to you. In a former letter I told you how Count Lieven hurried William Allen into his Coach, and how the Emperor followed to the Quakers Meeting. I will now say something of the interview between him and the Quakers on the Tuesday following.

The persons introduced were William Allen, John Wilkinson, the Preacher, at the Emperors Request, and Stephen Grellet. The Emperor was dressed in a plain blue Coat & received them without his hat. The Conversation lasted a whole hour. They and the Emperor stood all the while, he with his hat off and they with their hats on.

He began by addressing himself to John Wilkinson. He thanked him for the gratification he had received from his discourse. The doctrines which he had heard from his mouth were precisely the same as his own, but more particularly that of the holy spirit, without which men would vainly endeavour to become holy and religious. As to the truth of them (laying his hand upon his breast) he said: "I feel it here."

He enquired into the Manner of the education of their children and particularly their discipline, with which he was greatly struck, and then entered into what they called the tenets of their religion: he and they at length went at large into various doctrines of Christianity, and as the deeper parts of it became the topics of conversation he appeared to be more interested and displayed a Knowledge and reading of the scriptures, at which the Quakers were surprized.

He reverted after this to the subject of education, and spoke of the importance of a general one in every Kingdom. He and W^m Allen went into a Comparison of the mode and expence in the Bell and Lancastrian schools, and he desired W^m Allen to make Calculations of the sum for which all the poor children of England might be educated annually. This was done upon the spot and he seemed to be agreeably surprized at the result. From education he went back to the subject of religion ; and enquired into the reason why they used no particular forms of prayer. An answer was given him upon which he said a form for public worship was perhaps necessary, but he was convinced from his own experience, that private prayer, when a man retired to his own closet, was best where it was left to the spirit of God to dictate. He then said he considered himself among friends and fellow Christians, and therefore he spoke out the more freely. He had been in the habit, he said, of prostrating himself before the Almighty daily nor did the fatigue or bustle of Camp or din of arms prevent him. Some years ago he had retired to his closet with a set form of prayer ; but he found it would not do. His mind was not always in a state to suit the words. Besides, he had many wants, which the words would not satisfy. He therefore discarded the form of prayer, and fell on his knees, and always found that he was helped in his infirmities, and he rose up always more gratified and refreshed by this than the former mode.

He then thanked them over and over again for their Conversation. It had been, he said, a feast to him. It was difficult in his situation in England to unbosom himself on religious subjects, or to enjoy the converse of religious men, and at home it was much the same from the darkness of those about him on the subject of religion. " I and my dear sister," says he, " frequently meet and converse on those subjects and no body can tell the divine pleasure we feel on such occasions ; but as to those poor gilded creatures," says he, " whom you see about me, what consolation can I get from them by conversing on this subject ? "

He said he lamented that just as he had come to the knowledge of such estimable persons as those present he was about to leave the Kingdom. He should very much have liked to spend a day with some one of them in one of their houses, and to have seen their mode of living, as it really was,

without any alteration on his account ; and added that, as he should travel by land from Portsmouth to Dover, if they would give him the address of some plain Quaker on the road, he would contrive to get out of his carriage unnoticed, and call upon him unawares, and converse with him, without letting him know who he was.²

William Allen and Stephen Grillet soon after this suggested to the Emperors Notice and Protection the case of the unhappy Africans as connected with the slave trade. He entered most feelingly into this subject, and seemed affected, but said he had done all he could, when at Paris. He hoped however to make another trial at the Congress at Vienna. It ought to have the execration of all good men. Here he paused, and then added, what it is useful to us to know, but what I must not reveal.

Speaking on the subject of spending time usefully, it appeared that he did not at all like the manner of high life in England, as he had seen it. The gentlemen wasted their time by lying in bed, but what had been most disagreeable to him was the sitting for two hours over "the stinking smells of meat" (his own words) and for twice that time over "the horrible drinking of Wine." This was so much time lost for doing good.

When the three Friends left him, he shook hands with them most cordially. "I give you," says he, "Gentlemen, the right hand of brotherhood, and if either you or your Friends should come to Petersburg on any religious concern, come to me at once (and not through any other channel) and I will take care of you."

Many more things he said, but I have not learned them. You may read this Letter to your friends privately and accompany it with my former : but on no account read it to any Quaker. The Emperor was sorry he could not see me.³ He would read all my books, when at home. If I could have met him at Portsmouth and Dover he would have given me half an hour at any place where I might say I

² The Emperor had his wish accomplished. He called on Nathaniel Rickman at Amberstone, saw over the house and had some refreshments. The incident is recorded in *The Friend* (Lond.), 1861 ; and in *The Time of Her Life*, by Maude Robinson, 1919. See also *My Ancestors*, by Norman Penney, 1920.

³ Clarkson appears to have had an interview with the Emperor of Russia next year.

would wait for him : but it was un-necessary as it related to y^e Slave Trade, as I myself was not a warmer friend to the abolition than he was. Being of y^e Committee & Chairman of it I could not leave London. Thank your father for his letter of to-day. I received yours
farewell &c.

T. C.

[Addressed]

M^{rs} Clarkson
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk.

Copied from the original at Friends House.

"First Publishers of Truth"

The records of First Publishers in the Lancashire district printed in *F.P.T.* are meagre. They can be supplemented by the following relating to Yealand Meeting, taken from the minute books of the district, dating from 1678.

Other addenda to *F.P.T.* appear in vols. v. (Staffordshire), xiii. (Middlesex), xviii. (Norwich).

" This is a true and certaine record or memoriall of the names off those worthy and ffaithfull servants, And messengers off God who first brought the message off glad tydings to among us who was gathered to be a meeting And am known or called by the name of Kellett or Yealand meeting

" 1st George Fox and Richard Farnsworth was the first that brought the message of glad tydings among us

" 2ndly As to their sufferings at Steeple-houses, market places or elsewhere we have littel to say

" 3rdly The ffirst that Received them and their message in our meeting was Robert Wither, Richard Hubberthorn, Thomas Leaper, Robert Stout, Thomas Chorley, Chris Bissbrown and his family, francis fleming, W^m Higginson."

From a pamphlet by Robert Muschamp : *The Society of Friends in the Lancaster District in the Seventeenth Century*, 1928.

GLOSSARY OF NORTH YORKSHIRE WORDS.—Sir Alfred Pease, Bart., of Pinchinthorpe House, Guisbrough, Yorks, has compiled a dictionary of the North Riding of Yorkshire dialect, with very full illustrations of its use. He has, for instance, fourteen folios of the local names of birds. He is doubtful whether it would be possible to get the dictionary published.

See *Notes and Queries*, March 31st, 1928.