

Letters of William Forster of Tottenham

BY the kindness of Mrs. Vere O'Brien, of Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland (née Arnold-Forster), valuable MSS. from the Library of William Edward Forster came, in 1922, into Friends' Reference Library, including the Haistwell Diary, which was printed in 1925. Letters written by William Forster (1747-1824), schoolmaster, of Tottenham, to his sisters, were sent up by Mrs. O'Brien. Extracts from some of these have been printed in volumes xix-xxii. Other extracts follow :

Dr. John Gotbergill

William Forster to his sister Tabitha (Dorcas), 24 xi. 1777 :

" I waited on Betsy Barlow and Cousin Debby to Dr. F's after last Quar. Meetg. ; he was at home. We drank Tea, he treated us with much civility. In the Meeting he gave us expectation of a Visit being to be soon performed in Middlesex, and some hints respecting the same. It was not I tho't one of his best Speeches, there was rather a repetition, not enough variety of Expression for a Scholar, but quite enough for a Christian to convey his meaning to his brethren : as it was before the Females perhaps he endeavour'd to exert his abilities, for I doubt not that even Dr. F has sensations that would urge him thus on such an Occasion, and on this very acct. he might not speak so well.

" However, no sooner was the Business over than *we* Critics debated upon it, even in the meeting yard, *sixpence* was offered for it, I don't tell thee by whom lest thou should think it was one who thought him a Rival, or perhaps wanted to improve by the same. Thou knows a Prophet does not always receive Honor in his own Country—London is the Drs., and it often happens that Men as well as Children behave most engaging from Home. I see the Dr. engages all hearts abroad, and leaves all pleased with his attention, condescension, affability, politeness, &c. &c. Betsy Barlow speaks of him quite superlatively, my sister Tabitha in more than the comparative, it's no wonder for he is a worthy Friend, and if he had less practice would be more at leisure to please every body. It is by this alone, I mean a hurry of business, that at times affects his disposition and causes—its effects."

Thomas Church and his Ministry

“ Thomas Church has of late been more liberal in his offerings, particularly first-day three weeks, when Thomas Phillips interrupted him, informing the audience he was not in unity as a Minister. This did not hinder him from proceeding, and last Monthly Meeting an appointment was made to pay him a Visit, after some opposition, Danl Bell attending probably for that purpose. The Friends have waited on him : he assured them as usual that he could not be silent, nor would he, when he thought it his duty to appear, let the advice of his Friends be what it might—that those who opposed him were under greater delusion than himself.”

Dr. Knowles and his Coach

William Forster to a sister, 17 ii. 1778 :

“ Dr. Knowles has at last a Coach of his own. I called on him a week since and drank tea. Mary was just going in full dress to pay the Bride visit to Geo. Harrison wife. The coach is elegant, a dark olive with a metal K on the door, of considerable magnitude.”

The Widow Crawley

William Forster to his sister Tabitha, from Tottenham, 18 ii. 1778, referring to a visit to Hitchin :

“ Hearing of a very ancient Friend, the widow Crawley, mother to Friend Crawley, beforementioned, I was desirous of seeing her and asked Joshua [? Wheeler] to accompany me. She is a fine old Woman indeed, very far in the decline of life, upwards of ninety, was reclining on a couch, and appeared in a very languid state ; yet upon my asking after some of the ancient Friends, she soon revived, and told me she was daughter to John Field, of George Yard, that many of the Friends used almost constantly to breakfast at her father's on their return from the Morning Meeting first days, when the ministers met to divide among the Meetings, that William Penn was intimately acquainted with them, and at her Marriage. She also attended the meetings held with his family when in the Fleet, said she never saw his equal as a Christian and a Gentleman, that he appeared of a Rank much superior to other Men and much exalted by affliction. Samuel Waldenfield, Thomas Ellwood and all eminent in her Time she knew well, and says there were so many in the Ministry in the City that the long Gallery in Gracechurch Street would seldom hold them.”

Mercy Field was born in 1688, daughter of John and Margery (Saunders) Field, of London. She married Thomas Crawley, of London, in 1706. Their daughter Sarah was born in 1717. Mercy Crawley died in 1778, aged ninety, and her daughter Sarah departed this life in 1799.

For Sarah Crawley, see *Jnl. F.H.S.* ii. x. xii. xv. xvi ; *Piety Promoted*.

A student of the history of Hitchin writes (1928) : “ Widow Crawley was in reduced circumstances during the last years of her life. In fact Sarah Crawley had to run a pastry cook's shop to keep the two of them from want ” (R. L. HINE, author of *History of Hitchin*).