

Supplements Nos. 16 and 17— London Yearly Meeting 1789-1833

THE Friends Historical Society has rendered a service to students of Quakerism by publishing these two volumes.¹ They consist of notes carefully written down during the sittings of London Yearly Meeting, in the later part of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century, by Richard Cockin—supplemented (especially during a few years when R.C. was not in attendance) by notes found in the writings of James Jenkins, William Savery, Elizabeth Fry and others. Norman Penney has edited the volumes with his usual scrupulous care, preserving the quaint spelling of the authors, and giving the main biographical facts concerning nearly every one of the scores, if not hundreds, of Friends mentioned by them; with explanations, when needed, of episodes which they allude to. There is an excellent Introduction, running to nearly twenty pages, by T. Edmund Harvey, which directs attention to many of the most interesting and important features of the Notes. I will endeavour not to repeat here what he has so well said.

The period is one of considerable importance for the understanding of Quaker history. The Quietism that marked the greater part of the eighteenth century was being very gradually disturbed, and was finally broken up, by the Evangelical movement that was rapidly changing the face of religion in this country, but was very late in affecting a body so exclusive as the Society of Friends had then become. Most Friends of the period, including the authors of these Notes, seem to have been, for the most part, quite unconscious that any radical change was taking place.

¹ *Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, 1789-1833*, being Extracts from the Notes of Richard Cockin, supplemented by those of James Jenkins and others. In two parts. Edited by Norman Penney, LL.D., F.S.A., Introduction by T. Edmund Harvey, M.A. (London: Friends House, Euston Road, N.W.1; Philadelphia, Pa. 304, Arch Street; 217 pages, price for the separate parts 7s. 6d. (\$2.00) each, for both parts 12s. 6d. (\$3.25).

Richard Cockin (1753-1845) came from a village near Doncaster, joining the Society by conviction during a stay in London, after which he carried on a drapery business at Doncaster. He was well acquainted with Thomas Shillitoe, the shoemaker-minister, who had become a Friend rather earlier. His Notes reveal him as a man of sterling character, humble and cheery and benevolent, who, though without any marked ability or profound insight, was a not unskilful judge of spiritual things and earnestly desired to follow the best light he had. He welcomed (for example) every movement towards a better realisation in practice of Friends' theoretical belief in the spiritual equality of the sexes. Very different was James Jenkins (1753-1831), his contemporary, whose "Records and Recollections" have here been drawn upon. He had a wonderful gift of hitting off in a few words the characters of prominent Friends, and tried to use it fairly. His comments, while pithy and sometimes caustic, are not meant unkindly. He evidently had little faith in the "prophetic" ministry (then frequent in the Society) which followed the example of the Hebrew prophets and the Book of Revelation in announcing forthcoming woes. Of a sermon by Job Scott in 1793, in which the speaker foretold the speedy downfall of the Roman Church after attacks upon the Quakers, he writes: "I recollect that it made a great impression on the Meeting at the time, but, as with myself so I have reason to think it was with many others, that impression subsided, and was succeeded by a belief that this eminently qualified and excellent minister was, in what he said respecting the disturbance of Friends, most assuredly mistaken. . . . In 1798 the Pope Pius VI. was dethroned without more disturbance to the Friends of this country than the alighting of a fly on the dome of their famous Cathedral." James Jenkins would seem to have been one who helped Friends towards a sounder valuation of the nature of "inspired" ministry.

Much of the time of Yearly Meeting in those days was taken up with hearing Appeals—usually of individuals against their Monthly and Quarterly Meetings for disowning them—which yielded very little, if anything, of spiritual value. We may be thankful that the practice of

“appealing” has died out. The number of American Friends travelling in the ministry was surprisingly large; at most of our Yearly Meetings quite a number were present.

The change in religious emphasis as the years went on—from faithfulness to the Inner Light to correctness of belief in the Bible and the Divinity of Christ—is illustrated in these pages, and was probably due in part to the influence of some of these American visitors, especially David Sands. The landmarks are the Hannah Barnard episode of 1800 and 1801 (which is treated here with freshness by James Jenkins); the unanimous decision of the Yearly Meeting of 1814 to uphold the disownment of Thomas Foster, who had appealed against his Monthly Meeting after being disowned for circulating Unitarian books; and the great Separation in America of 1828 and 1829. On the two latter subjects little fresh light is here thrown.

Some new information will be found concerning the thrilling incident at the Yearly Meeting of 1830, when the Duchess of Gloucester came from the dying King, George IV. (her brother), and called out William Allen and Elizabeth Fry to ask for “the prayers of Friends.” It seems that what the Duchess really wanted was Thomas Shillitoe, whom the King wished to see instead of a clergyman. “Send for the old Quaker” are said to have been his words. Shillitoe had had an interview with him at Brighton, presenting a paper in which he had the courage and faithfulness to rebuke him for his sins.

EDWARD GRUBB

Southey and Early Friends

In a letter, dated Dec. 1. 1820, Robert Southey acknowledges the receipt of a “pamphlett,” sent him by Mrs. Fry, and answers a criticism of a passage quoted by him in his *Life of Wesley* (Longmans, 3rd ed. 1846, vol. 1, p. 442)—the passage appeared to him to be a curiosity and that nothing could be further from his intention than that of offending the existing Society of Quakers. He adds, however, that the opinion that some of the Quakers of the “first age” were contentious and given to railing had some foundation in fact.

Information from Edgar G. Harcourt, Four Oaks, Birmingham.