

# George Fell and the Story of Swarthmoor Hall

*Continued from vol. xxix, p. 61*

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**U**PON the praemunire of Margaret Fell her son came forward and his action was clearly defined by his family as an intention to have the occupiers of the property dispossessed and himself to take possession. A modern view of his proceeding credits him with the sole desire that the property should be preserved in the family. The following from various sources shed light upon this period of Fell's life :

The humble petition of George Fell of Swarthmore  
in the County of Lancaster  
Sheweth

That your petitioner's mother being seduced into that fanatic opinion of the Quakers in the late time of usurpation, and notwithstanding all the means used by your petitioner and his friends to reclaim her, yet hath she still obstinately continued in the same (to the great trouble and grief of heart of your petitioner who hath ever been loyal and faithful to your Majesty), by reason whereof she hath run herself into a praemunire, and so hath justly forfeited to your Majesty her estate during her life.

Therefore humbly prayeth that your Sacred Majesty will graciously be pleased out of your abundant clemency to bestow the said estate upon your petitioner, he being the only heir at law thereunto, that he may be the better enabled to serve your Sacred Majesty.

And your petitioner shall pray, etc.

Annexing

These are to certify that George Fell of Swarthmore in the county of Lancaster, Esq., was never in arms against his Majesty that now is nor his father of blessed

memory, but did before his Majesty's happy restoration express his great desire therefor, and did testify such his expressions as well by going himself and carrying his whole interest which was considerable with him to vote for the election of Sir Robert Bindloss and Sir Roger Bradshaigh to be Knights for the Shire . . . and did also march to Barran Downs with the Earl of Derby as his duty to congratulate his Majesty's happy return.

And that he (because he could not persuade his mother to return to her due obedience to his Majesty by conforming herself to the Church of England, which her refusal was to his great trouble and as he thought no less to his disgrace) did absent himself hitherto out of his own country, thereby hoping to prevail with her but however thereby to manifest his great dislike and disapprobation of her resolution to persist in that way.

This in all justice to him and to prevent all mistakes, we have made bold to certify. Witness our hands this first day of December, 1664,

ROGER BRADSHAIGH  
RICH : KIRKBY

(*Cal. S.P.Dom.* 1664-5, 161, *Ext.* 228.)

The imprisonment of M. Fell was not a close one. Visitors came and went, also letters. Prison literature came from her quill. The question of the disposal of the Swarthmoor estate was of much concern to the family. From Lancaster Castle M. Fell wrote to her son and daughter Rous a letter which has apparently not survived but is referred to in her next on the subject, dated 1 x. 1664. It is noticeable that in this letter the writer refers to her son as "your brother Fell," also that the sisters Sarah, Susannah and Rachel, who were at Lancaster, send "dear love to you and to their brother Fell."

The following is extracted from the letter :

. . . Last week I wrote my mind concerning your brother Fell, and I would desire to know his mind as to what he intends to do as shortly as may be, for we wish to make a sale of some part of the goods. But if he comes to live in the country and to take things into his own hands, we should make a sale of all and

he shall have what he sees fitting. I would have you persuade him to come to the country, and as soon as may be.

In a postscript: "The enclosed to thy brother Fell deliver to him thyself."

Here is the wording of the grant to George Fell of the Swarthmoor property:

4 January, 1664-5. Our will, &c., that you forthwith prepare a bill for our royal signature to pass, &c., containing our grant unto George Fell, Gent., of the estate real and personal, late of Fell of Swarthmore in our county Palatine of Lancaster forfeited unto us upon the conviction of the said Fell of praemunire . . . and that you are to add such further clauses and nonobstantes as you shall think fit and are usual in grants of like nature. W.B.

To our Attorney General.

(*Cal. S.P.Dom.* 1664-5, 161, *Ext.* 228.)

As a result of above grant George Fell would take formal possession, retaining a London residence and permitting his sisters to remain at the Hall.

His youthful companion, William Caton, wrote to M. Fell at Lancaster Castle from Amsterdam, 30 i. 1664/5:

Having understood that George Fell was at Swarthmore, I have writ the enclosed to him, which thou may read over, and let it then be sealed and sent him (Swarth. MSS. Trans. I. 534).

Meanwhile John Rous tells us in a letter to his mother-in-law dated 6 vi. 1664:

I was with sister Fell last night but hear nothing of my brother Fell;

and in a letter written at Mile End, 21 ix. 1664:

I went to speak with my brother Fell but he was not at home, and, since, I was there and carried thy letter to him and then they said he was gone to Whitehall. We have not seen him now for about a fortnight

and so know not what he hath done, nor how far he hath proceeded. But I spoke with Thomas Speed who was last week with him at Whitehall, where he searched the record where all such things, if they are given away, are entered, and T.S. told me they could not find that it was granted to anyone. My sister [Hannah] told me my brother was with Col. Kirkby and that he was very courteous to him, but it is well known what his fair words come to.

I forgot in my last to give thee an account of what I had done about the £36 my brother was to pay Robert Dring. I, perceiving that my brother was in a great strait about the money and knew not where to get it, and that the nonpayment of it would turn much to his discredit, upon his promise to repay it me in a month, I told Robert Dring I would see him satisfied. This I did before I received thy first letter about it. I was not willing to drive it off long after I had passed my word for it lest Robert Dring should have any hard thoughts concerning me for not paying it, and so when rents come in I would desire thee to reserve so much for me, lest my brother when he come down dispose of it otherwise, which would turn my kindness to him into a prejudice to myself.

Having become a land owner, G. Fell came under the provisions of the Militia Act, and he would have to "provide one man fully armed" or else pay a composition. The Deputy-lieutenants of the county were charged with the working of the Act. George Fell wrote to Sir Roger Brads-haigh, of Haigh, near Wigan, who was a Deputy-lieutenant of Lancashire from 1660 to 1675 :

Sir,

The warrant coming to my hand but yesterday (and Mr. Sawrey at so great distance) I could not possibly send my man before this, which I hope you will pardon. Neither could I furnish him according to the warrant with back, breast and pott,<sup>1</sup> by reason that the suit of armour that I bought by my Lord of Darby's order for his Majesty's service was taken out of my house by Sir George Middleton's servants, and as yet

<sup>1</sup> pot=a steel cap or small helmet.

not restored, which I hope may plead my excuse (together with the shortness of the notice) that he is at present deficient in that. One favour more, dear Sir, I beg—that you would give him as quick a dispatch as possibly you could; and if there be necessity of keeping the troop longer together or meeting suddenly again, that you would order some sufficient person (we being at so great distance) to do that duty for us. The charge I shall refer to you to do your discretion and shall ever acknowledge the obligation as an addition to those favours which have already made me perpetually, noble Sir, your most cordial servant,

GEORGE FELL.

Swarthmoor, 12 July.

(From the original in the possession of the late William Farrer, Lit.D., included in his article, "North Lonsdale after the Restoration" in *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archæological Society*, vol. xii. 1912.)

The four years imprisonment of M. Fell was now drawing to a close. The following appears among State Papers :

Representation of the state and condition of Margaret Fell, now prisoner in Lancaster Castle, made to the King, that he may release her, as she has been more than three years in a cold, windy, smoky, wet prison because she refused the Oath of Allegiance, her conscience not permitting her to swear. (*Cal. S.P.Dom.* 1666-7, 481.)

The discharge took place in June 1668, to the regret of the local aristocracy. Fleming wrote to Williamson from Rydal, 21 August 1668 :

The discharge of M. Fell from her easay imprisonment doth not a little encourage that Rabble of Fanaticks and discourage all Magistrates from acting against them. (*Cal. S.P.Dom.* 1667-8, 546, *Ext.* 277.)

The family party at the wedding of Margaret Fell and George Fox, 27 October 1669, consisted of six daughters and three sons-in-law, and there was much satisfaction expressed at the connection, but the mother's heart may well have

grieved at the absence of her only son. We quote again from Thomas Hodgkin :

To him his mother's remarriage brought no accession of income, and one can easily understand that the social disparagement of such a kinship with the homely shepherd of Leicestershire would be keenly felt by the young magistrate when he met Kirkby, Fleming, and others of the magisterial cousinry at Quarter Sessions or Militia dinners. (*George Fox*, 1896, 215.)

The following two letters indicate in detail the family difficulties in regard to property at this time. The first is from George Fox to his wife, from Enfield, 23 x. 1669 :

Dear Heart,

Here hath been a great noise about thy son George Fell as having orders to send thee to Westchester and me to Jersey,<sup>2</sup> which I have been desirous might get as little as may be among Friends for Truth's sake ; but I am informed he hath them not out yet.

Now I hear he hath been with Kirkby and Monke and such like, and I understand his intent is to have Swarthmore and that he saith thou lost thy right by building, and by being married cannot have thy third of Marsh Grange and the mills, they being a customary estate ; and that it cost him forty pounds in getting a warrant to save thy estate, which he might have then taken, and that the agreement that thou made with him signifies nothing, thou being a prisoner.

But in all these things thou may perfectly inform thyself, but in wisdom and patience, that thou may make as little noise of it as may be. And thou may speak to thy brother Richardson about these things (in the seed and life) which are below. And reason quietly with him and them. As concerning the house keep over it and give both it and him to the Lord's ordering. And so if thou canst preserve a part to

<sup>2</sup> Other cases of proposed or actual banishment to the Island of Jersey appear in Quaker literature. William Penn refers in a letter to Margaret Fox from London, 29 viii. 1684, to the proposal to send William Welch to Jersey which was not carried out owing to his death (*Jnl. F.H.S.* ix. 143). William Prynne, anti-Quaker writer, was sent to the Island under censure for libel.

thyself, the interest thou hast already whereby thee may not be banished out of the country by him. And thou may speak with thy brother Richardson about this also, for if he should wholly put thee out of the house, it might hurt himself and be the destroying of himself turning the Lord out of doors.

Now if thou should make another agreement in another name [Fell to Fox] it may beget another trouble and may be worse than the former. If he hath defamed and blemished thee at the Court, thou should come up some time and clear it, that such things may be emptied out of their minds and thou come over all their orders, if he have any orders but I think he hath none.

G.F.

Dear Mother,

In my last I gave thee an account what had passed between my brother Fell and me and my father's mind concerning it, in his own words so near as I could remember, only through forgetfulness omitted to let thee know that my father left all things to thyself and by the above letter from him thou wilt fully understand his mind further in it.

He mentioned something before of thy leaving that dark country, but considering that thy holding an interest in the house may be a restraint to my brother's being frequented by bad company which may work his undoing.

My brother and sister Fell and uncle Richardson dined last 3rd day at our house and my brother and sister stayed with us all night. I took an opportunity to inform my uncle how my brother had expressed himself in relation to the marriage, and that he intended to get an order to send my father prisoner to Jersey and thee to Westchester, which uncle seemed much to dislike and said it would be very unnatural. I also acquainted him how that my brother had offered to refer the whole business to him and [here the MS. is torn] . . . good office that lay in his power between you should not be wanting. I do not think that my uncle is anyways disaffected towards thee and thy marrying and if he [MS. torn] . . . classed with my brother in his opposition to thee, but advised

him to the contrary to be more moderate than he otherwise would be both in words and actions. When my uncle was gone my wife and I took occasion to speak further to my brother, whose view we found much as I advised thee in my last, namely, if thou would leave Lancashire he would allow thee £200 a year, but at Swarthmore thou should not stay, and if thou would not yield to those terms, then he would get thee sent to prison and might [MS. torn] . . . would give thee anything, and said further that if thou would not agree with [MS. torn] . . . he would proclaim to all the world (if he used extremity) that thou was in [MS. torn] . . . We used as many arguments as we could to persuade him but we could not prevail. He hath been for the most part [MS. torn] . . . humour, but my sister Fell told me within those days he had been more lightsome and cheerful than he was before. I suppose [MS. torn] . . .

Coming into more moderation he hath eased his mind of that weight and burden which the extreme prejudice he was in had brought upon him. We inquired of him whether he had any ways scandalized you to them he had been with about the orders, and he would not acknowledge anything. He told us that Col. Kirkby had sent for him twice about the order for my father since I had spoken to him, but he had not gone to him and intended to let it be till he knew what thou would do, and then if thou did not agree with him he would have them upon writing a letter. He is at present pretty easy to deal with and I believe with gentleness may be brought to much, but I had hard work and a great burden on me before I could bring him to anything and was almost in doubt whether he would come to anything or no. But when he began to fall he came down apace, and I believe is not insensible of the benefit thereof in his own particular though for a while he reflected on me, and asked me why I concerned myself more than the rest of his brothers and sisters. I told him I had no other end than to work reconciliation among so near relations and that he might not do those things which would make everybody cry out against him.



On 4th day in the forenoon we parted very lovingly and at his going away he expressed himself with more love and affection to my wife than I have known come from him to her these many years, and hath promised to come and see us again before he goeth out of town, so that we expect him again to-morrow, and then we intend to see what further may be done with him in relation to Swarthmore, and offer to his consideration my sisters concerns in the country, which if you should all be put away from thence might very much suffer.

Thy dear son in the Lord, JOHN ROUS.

Since I concluded my letter my brother Fell was with us and we cannot prevail anything with him about thy part of Swarthmore.

Newington, 25 of the 10th Mo., 1669.

(Thirnbeck MSS. 8, 9, both letters in the handwriting of John Rous and endorsement by John Abraham.)

With respect to the possible removal of Margaret Fox from Swarthmoor, it is interesting to read a remark in a letter from Gulielma Maria Penn, dated in 1684: "Methinks if thou foundest a clearness in the Lord, it would be happier if thou wert nearer thy dear husband and children, but I leave it to the Lord's ordering and thy freedom." (Quoted in *Fells*.)

Margaret Fox's second imprisonment began in February or March 1670. It must be evident from the foregoing letters that George Fell's relations were satisfied that he was at work to dispossess his mother of her home. Dr. Hodgkin wrote:

He brought vexatious and apparently unfounded claims against his mother for some of her dealings with the Swarthmoor estate; and there is too much reason to believe that he approved, if he did not actually originate the action of the justices in renewing her suspended sentence of imprisonment. (*George Fox*, 1896, 215.)

Thomas Lower wrote to his mother-in-law from London, 19 ii. 1670:

We have received a letter about thy recommittment. When first we received the information thereof, I was more grieved for my brother's barbarous and

unnatural actions towards thee than for thy confinement, for it will tend to thy more certain preservation, and only hasten his woe and sorrow that hath procured it. We were this day with our father and showed thy letter to him. He is sorry for my brother Fell's foolish carriage towards thee in this matter. From thence we went to Luke's, I and my wife and sister Sarah. We found not brother at home, but to his wife we spared not to lay the treacherous dealings of her husband in his bringing down the order before her, and also to manifest to her the odiousness of the fact in general which was abominable amongst heathen. She confidently denied that her husband or she knew anything of it or that he had carried it down or was in the least privy to it. After much plain dealing with her, we left it to the just judgment of the Lord, who would assuredly recompense upon them the like measure in his own due time, and so parted from her, but she still pleaded not guilty. Indeed the action is so brutish that all that hears of it are ashamed of it. My brother the doctor would scarce believe that my brother Fell had any hand in it. But it is too apparent that it was of his procuring.

The letter closes with the following which may refer to some action of George Fell: "We are glad to hear of my sisters intention to indict the rioters and make them and my brother know their folly." (Swarth. MSS. i. 381.)

In addition to the personal attention to the actions of George Fell by members of his family, there are indications that others also interested themselves in the young lawyer. Thomas Speed met him at Whitehall, his uncle Matthew Richardson interviewed him, but the principal record of this intervention is contained in a letter to George Fell's widow in which Elizabeth Hooton reminds her :

When I was with thee and thy husband, I had something on my spirit from the Lord that he might be warned from persecuting the just or joining with them that did, for he is gone from the Truth which he once was in and joined himself with the persecuting magistrates and priests, and had been a means to cause his mother to be persecuted and imprisoned and them

that met at her house, and this (so far as I did hear) was thy husband's work. I was moved of the Lord to go to him and declare to him he was gone out from that Truth he was in before and now hath he joined himself with the persecutors and was a lover of pleasures and did not at all love the Truth but persecuted it, and was a means to keep his mother in prison and was the means (for aught I could hear) to praemunire her.

But I was made to tell him that if he did go on in that persecuting way and would not turn to the Truth which he once received, the Lord would cut him off both root and branch. And though his mother was set at liberty again by the King, yet did thy husband go to the King again and got her praemunired and put into prison again (for aught I know) and now the Lord's hand hath cut him off and shortened his days. (*Elizabeth Hooton, 1914, 65.*)

In another letter E. Hooton writes of "a rebellious and disobedient son."

Emma C. Abraham of Swarthmoor Hall, and Grassendale Park, Liverpool, a descendant of Daniel Abraham and Rachel Fell, has long held the view that historians have not correctly judged the strained relations between George Fell and his family. Miss Abraham wrote to the compiler of this narrative under date 26 i. 1931 :

Perhaps it may be rather difficult for Friends, knowing the moral greatness and natural nobility of George Fox, to understand how he appeared to young George Fell,—probably as only a low-born, illiterate fanatic, who had deluded and imposed upon his mother and sisters.

George Fell was a barrister living in London, doubtless mixing with other men of his class, married to a London lady whose brother, also a barrister, was author of a biography of the English judges. It is easy to imagine the jests and ridicule which George Fell probably had to endure at the time of his mother's marriage. I think that Friends have been unjust and intolerant towards George, except Dr. Hodgkin, who wrote of him reasonably as a man of the world might, though even he did not know George's legal position and rights.

The family letters which have been quoted will exhibit the state of feeling between George Fell and several of his relations. These relations entertained no doubts respecting his conduct in the matter of his mother's imprisonment and praemunire, and they used strong language in their correspondence thereon.

Unfortunately no statements by George Fell regarding his intentions have come to light among the thousands of family MSS. still surviving and in the absence of contemporary evidence, we cannot support the contention that his efforts were directed to the preservation for the family of Swarthmoor Hall and other property.

The death of George Fell took place 14 October 1670, at the early age of about thirty-one, his widow being left in somewhat poor circumstances. His will was dated 7 October, and his residence given as Swarthmoor. The testator first makes bequests to his children and to his wife as long as she remains his widow. In default of issue property was left to his brother-in-law, William Yeamans and to his favourite sister Isabel Yeamans and their heirs; also other property in further default to his sisters, "daughters of my father and their heirs equally to be divided amongst them". Uncle Matthew Richardson and George Hilton "four pounds a piесе to buy each of them a ring, hoping for their assistance to my wife and children". Hannah Fell was his executrix. He desired that his body should be "buried in the parish church of Ulverston as near to my father as with conveniency it may be."

*To be concluded*

### CORRECTIONS

Vol. xxix. Page 59.—What is termed "the official record" of the marriage of George Fell was the licence<sup>3</sup> for the marriage, to take place either at St. Dunstan in the East or<sup>4</sup> St. Margaret's, Lothbury. The marriage took place at the latter church on December 27th.

Page 51.—The date of the baptism of Judge Thomas Fell was 13th March 1599/1600, not as stated on this page.

*Amendments kindly sent by F. R. Shackleton.*

<sup>3</sup> Marriage licence at the Faculty Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury at London.

<sup>4</sup> For of read *or*.