

An Anti-Slavery Enthusiast, 1826

Communicated by ISABEL GRUBB

Joshua Beale (1763-1833) of Cork, son of Joseph and Rebecca Beale, remained a Quaker in spirit all his life although he was disowned by Cork Friends at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Of this event he writes, "I went among this people in love. There was no room for the like of me. My recommendation to seek for Divine guidance, the inner principle of truth, was like the Israelites' livestock, an abomination to the Egyptians."

As early as 1788 one of his letters refers to the interest Cork Friends were taking in the cause of the slaves, but the following letters from him illustrate his own part in the work at a later date. They are interesting as showing the technique of philanthropic action at a time when transport and postage were greater problems than they now are. They also show how Friends learned to unite with people of other bodies, and what difficulties they had in maintaining their "testimonies".

These letters were written to Mary (née Shackleton) Leadbeater (1758-1826) and are in the possession of Sarah L. Barrington, one of her descendants. The sister, to whom reference is made, was Sarah Shackleton (1760-1847), a recorded minister, who was blind for many years, but active and cheerful in spite of her affliction.

Mary Leadbeater, daughter of Richard Shackleton, schoolmaster of Ballitore, was an authoress and also postmistress of the village. Samuel Haughton, her cousin by marriage, lived near Carlow.

George and Ebenezer Shackleton, her nephews, were millers at Ballitore. Ebenezer was also her son-in-law, having made a run-away match with his first cousin, Deborah Leadbeater. By his second wife he was the grandfather of Sir Ernest Shackleton. Thomas Boake, John Thomas, and Thomas Bewley also lived at Ballitore and were cousins of Mary Leadbeater's.

The group of Friends mentioned in the later part of the letter represent the most important Friends of Ulster Quarterly Meeting. Thomas Christy Wakefield and James Nicholson Richardson and John Richardson lived at Moyallon. Joseph and William James Barcroft (brothers), William and Jonathan Pike (uncle and nephew), and William Garratt and Joseph Willcocks, lived near Dungannon, Co. Tyrone. John Conran, a convinced Friend and a recorded minister for about forty-eight years, lived at The Maze near Lisburn. His *Journal* was published in London, 1850. Jacob Green lived near Lisburn. Dominic Gregg was a Lisburn Friend, he died 19.iii.1826.

Myrtlehill [Cork], 23 of 1st mo. 1826.

. . . I mentioned something of our anti-slavery society to thy sister, & intend sending thee a paper which

contains our petition which as soon as it passes thro' your circle thou would oblige me by passing to Saml Haughton. Have you no person in the village that would set the business going in the County of Kildare? I did it thro' the medium of the protestant dissenting ministers who gave their minds and strength to it. At one time I expected our plan would be overturned by the interference of the West India merchants who are very strong here but had they succeeded I had determined to form the Society if but two united with me at first, and trust to its increasing. Considering my nicety about meddling with Clergy who take pay I examined very closely what I was about, & waited till I believed it safer for me to take a step than tarry longer. I then proceeded as the way opened, & never since doubted it being my business. Could I have found another to do it, I had no inclination to leave my retirement, but the unhappy situation of 800,000 of our fellow beings, degraded almost to the condition of brutes & near the whole white population of the Colonies demoralized to an alarming degree, called as I thought loudly on me to do what appeared my part, that I might stand clear of this very great evil. I have found much more satisfaction of a secondary nature in my progress than I at all expected. I have met & had pleasant intercourse with several excellent men, who tho' differing in minor points of religious faith, as they call it, are united amongst themselves by a bond of Christian love of which I also participate with them. Attention to divers public institutions had brought them together before my general acquaintance with them and I hold my place without compromising what I owe to my own religious character; & tho' acting occasionally as Secretary I need say nothing, write nothing nor do anything that at all appears to me inconsistent therewith. Some of the ministers have told me they are content without my stiling them reverend, & I do not so much as *Esquire* anyone. To our president I would write *Baron Carbery* as being his legal name but no Right Honourable. In our petition I was informed by the Committee that they would be content with its being in Quaker language & like it as well but it was concluded at my instance best not to do so, as it would then appear only from that body, but a remedy was found in those of the profession signing together with an exception to the titles of ceremony preceding their names.

I have been particularly anxious that my ci-devant brethren might not thro' my means be led into any inconsistency which I find quite unnecessary. I thus go into detail to induce some of you in Ballitore to set the business going. Could not George or Ebenezer or Thos Boake young hearty intelligent men form a society & get up a petition, it might be of "the undersigned inhabitants" of one county or of more or of Carlow & Ballitore, put some public character in the chair and pass resolutions & a petition, draw it up neatly on strong white paper & let it be signed by men of respectability & let your Co. member present it as soon as may be after the meeting of parliament.

I intend accompanying this with some papers on the subject & if more is wanting let your secretary write for them to Richard Matthew the parent Society secy in London. Let none of my dear friends in Ballitore say we are too few to do anything. Within the circle of your acquaintance thro' the country get the signatures of every respectable person you can in Athy, Castledermot, Moone, Timolin, I would not swell it with the names of children nor any that were *not* known to be decent people, even though not rich or grand they may be respectable. Let those who read the Anti-Slavery Reporter put themselves in the place of those poor creatures who are (unless something is done to relieve them) doomed to interminable bondage. Should thou succeed in stirring up a feeling in favour of those oppressed people amongst you & that further information is wanted let your secretary write freely addressed to W. R. Osborne & me, secretaries to the Cork Anti-Slavery Society, without hesitation & we are quite at your service. I wish it to be done thus because it will come officially before us and be an encouragement to us to go forward (not presuming however that our assistance is necessary when you have Dublin so near you). Thou would scarcely suppose I had anything to prevent me giving my whole strength to this business. This is by no means the case. I have to struggle to make time to do immediate business. I had however no intention of going thus far when I sat down to write to thee my dear friend, all this has since come up unexpectedly and I give it as it flows. Now for the part I wish thee to act. Call a meeting or invite together my dear friends Thomas Bewley, thy husband, Thos. Boake, John Thomas, thy

nephews (apologise to them for my not writing immediately to themselves) read to them what I have suggested, let them appoint one to take the chair for the occasion & a secretary into whose hands put the papers I send & then let them do as seemeth them good. If they choose to unite in one body with the females, no objection, only remember females are not to sign the petition which would not be received. I am sure there are men amongst you who would not grudge to ride a little about the country to get signatures, but I was forgetting that I would not have a friend take a petition that he could not consistently sign himself (& I take no charge of the petition here except the Quaker part) however your own sense will find out a mode of obviating this objection. I think it may be done without difficulty tho' I need not dictate. If you can find neighbours out of the Society let the first meeting be but preparatory, & appoint another to which invite them, & let there be one secretary from amongst them & other of your body, each to act in the parts where both in religious practices or modes differ from the other. Let no one say it is foolish or frivolous to make such an attempt, we are too few, & too scattered. Invite the dissenting minister & the man of the establishment, & the popish priest if you think he will be of use. We have tried their Bishop and think they will not unite. Indeed the clergy of the Establishment, are very inert here. Is Bonham with you or Major Keating or any other men of Character & Intelligence. I am greatly mistaken if you enter, in earnest, into this business you will be rewarded for your pains ; & be instruments of good in the general cause. We are about establishing a Society in Kerry and have commissioned a missionary thither, another in Bandon & a third in Mallow. So dear friends, whatever you find to do in this, I might say without exaggeration, momentous business do it with all your might while time is afforded. The minister Canning wants the support of the people of the United Kingdom & particularly of Ireland. Let him then have yours. There might be much more said but I must conclude with dear love to you all, my very dear friends, whom I hope to hear of individually coming forward without loss of time, & to thyself particularly my beloved Mary Leadbeater who is always ready to give thy aid to every good work in thy power.

JOSHUA BEALE

If you should go into the business a supply of papers will be necessary to spread the information requisite. No great subscription is requisite. If we defray our expenses and pay the society in London for the papers we order we want no more. We have therefore fixed the subscription so low as 5s. and in the Ladies society as they now express it we propose asking for no money unless any should offer it voluntarily. Yours' perhaps might be smaller. We give every member a number of the Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter, they are but 4s. per hundred & may be easily obtained I send herewith the 7 numbers out.

As I have enclosed in the parcel for Sam^l Haughton similar papers to those marked for Ballitore those marked for you may be kept for circulation in your neighbourhood to be lent & returned to the Secretary but not given away. Send him the newspaper when it has gone your rounds.

Six weeks later Mary Leadbeater was already suffering from what proved to be her last illness and Joshua Beale himself was ill from overwork in the anti-slavery cause, yet his enthusiasm was as great as ever.

Myrtle hill, 3d mo. 2nd, 1826

. . . Many thanks for your extraordinary exertions in behalf of the poor slaves, may the blessings of many of them which are ready to perish fall upon you ; but think not that we can readily let go the hold we have so well obtained of such excellent abolitionists, thou wilt have perceived by our printed circulars, forwarded yesterday by post, that we aim to raise all Ireland against this accursed system but thou will scarcely suppose that the number of active members in our committee can pretend to a sufficient knowledge of every part of Ireland, where petitions might go from, to find suitable persons to call on for their co-operation hence we must put our kind friends in inquisition ; the quarterly meeting for Ulster begins on first day next ; and we are anxious that every claim that *can* be put forward by our friends in Ballitore should overtake them in time. I have sent circulars to T. C. Wakefield, J. Conran, J. W. & J. Barcroft, W. Pike, Jonⁿ Pike, W. Garratt, Dom Greg, J. & J. Richardson, Jos. Wilcocks, Jonⁿ Hogg, Jacob Green, Wm. Dawson ; I send thee by this post two dozen more of them, for any others that you may think necessary I need not tell thee

that folded and directed as the others were *one penny* per dozen must be paid on putting them into the office after which they go free. Think not, my dear friend, I want to set thee writing, knowing how unfit it is for thee, rather than *that*, I would trust to some other opportunity but Richard Shackleton our kind & worthy brother in the cause, would press them into the service in thy name, or thy sister's, for this purpose a single letter might be addressed or rather directed to some leading member, and inside apprized that it is for himself, and every other person, mentioning them singly by name whom you think at all likely to engage in the cause ; fear not to put down thirty, fifty or as many more as you know, and entreat them in the name of suffering humanity to promote petitions in every part of Ulster where their influence extends ; there cannot be too many provided the signatures be respectable, if we could hear what petitions were got up as a result of their exertions it would be a particular satisfaction ; we have written to London for a large supply of publications on the subject and as soon as they arrive I intend to forward them as charity letters, like the circulars. The friends in Cork have petitioned the upper house as well as the lower addressing them only as Peers without the title Lords spiritual and temporal thinking that if the petition was rejected for want of this formality it might excite a discussion not unprofitable to the cause. I should not be sorry if friends everywhere did the like. . . .

Royal Historical Society Membership

The Hon. Secretary of the Royal Historical Society, 22 Russell Square, London, W.C.1, has sent information about a new class of Associate Membership recently established by the Society, which it is believed will interest some of our members.

Associates are elected in the first place for a period of five years. Their applications shall be supported either by two Fellows, or by an accredited historical scholar, or by the Council of an Historical or Record Society. The annual subscription from Associates is one guinea and they receive the *Transactions*, may attend ordinary meetings and use the Library for reference purposes.