

George Fell and the Story of Swarthmoor Hall

Continued from vol. xxx, p. 39

THE death of George Fell did not mitigate but rather intensified the disagreement between Margaret Fox and her son's family.¹ The husband's attempt to secure possession of Swarthmoor Hall was continued by the widow—Elizabeth Hooton wrote to the King and Council :

Her son's wife seeks to ruinate her mother-in-law by getting a judgment against her at this assizes at Lancaster to dispossess her of her proper right, and so both ruinate her and her children if she can. (*Elizabeth Hooton*, 1914, 66.)

Elizabeth Hooton continues, in a letter regarding George Fell, to write to his widow :

It is reported that thou hast gotten a judgment against [?] to sweep away all that she hath, both goods and lands. What a rebellious daughter-in-law art thou. Was there ever such a wicked thing done in England or in any age before, that thou should ruinate thy husband's mother. The same hand that cut off thy husband will do the same by thee and leave thee neither root nor branch if thou do not speedily repent and put off thy wicked invention and let thy mother alone with her estate. The Lord's terrible wrath and plagues will fall upon thee and thine. Therefore fear and dread the living God. While it is time put by thy wicked intent lest the same hand that took away thy husband may not take away thee in thy cruelty towards thy husband's mother who hath not done thee any hurt nor hath not wronged thee at all.

So to the light of Christ in thy conscience return, which will let thee see all thy ways. I am a lover of thy soul,

ELIZABETH HOOTON

Endorsed "E.H. to a woman unnamed who had got a judgment against her mother-in-law."

¹ His will is printed in this Journal, viii, 1911, 2-5.

This letter must have been written shortly before the writer left for America in August, 1671; she died abroad a few months later.

The following letter from Robert Sawrey to Sir Roger Bradshaigh contains a slight reference to George and Hannah Fell:

Much Honored Sir,

Having received an order from the Honourable Deputy Lieutenants in which they appoint me Poll for an horse in your Honour's troop in the room of Mr. George Fell, and in regard to the remoteness of my dwelling and the difficulties of the tides of several sands, as also my altogether unpreparedness for the accoutering of man and horse fit for such service, and so incapacitated to do that due and ready service I ought, and being informed by him who rode Mr. Fell's horse that persons may be employed on your side of the country, do for myself and upon the account of Mr. Fell's widow (who is joined, as before her husband was) presume to make it our humble suit that your Honour will please to appoint such a person as may be ready to serve you when called and admit us into the same condition; when Esquire Dodding and we shall thankfully pay our moneys to him and acknowledge ourselves very much obliged to yourself, and especially him who has ventured to give you this trouble, presuming upon your pardon and craving leave to subscribe himself,

Your humble servant in what I may,

ROB. SAWREY

Broughton Tower,

May the 15th, 1672.

John Rous wrote to Sarah Fell, shortly after the death of George Fell:

In regard to my sister Fell's wilfulness and foolishness, who, I always feared would do as bad, if not worse than her husband, she hath a crooked generation to be her advisers if she take counsel of her kindred, who no doubt will do the worst they can. (Dix MSS. N.I.E.)

Another letter of Elizabeth Hooton is endorsed: "For George Fells widow at Marsh Grange in Furness", from which it may be inferred that the widow and her children were living at the Grange. It appears from the Swarthmoor Hall account book that in December, 1673, arrears of rent due from her son were paid Margaret Fox in full, amounting to £25, and that Hannah Fell paid rent, though it was often overdue. It seems, however, that she was not in full possession of the Grange, perhaps only occupied certain rooms, for Sarah Fell's accounts constantly refer to expenses in connection with "ours at Marsh". Wages paid to servants at the Grange appear in the Hall accounts and numerous other outgoings. In 1676 Marsh Grange was purchased by Thomas Lower and "ours at Marsh" disappears from the account book about this time.

It has been seen that the brothers-in-law held strong views regarding George and Hannah Fell—Thomas Lower writes of his "foolish carriage" and "brutish action", John Rous of "my sister fell's wilfulness and foolishness" and William Meade of "her shame and reproach".

The sisters, however, seemed to be on friendly and visiting terms with Hannah Fell, styling her "sister Fell". On 9th March, 1673, Mary Lower, who was then living at the Hall, accompanied by her three unmarried sisters, paid a visit to their sister-in-law, and in June next year the same four dined at sister Fell's; these visits are recorded in Sarah's account-book because on each occasion the present of one shilling was made to Mary Caton, one of the servants at the Grange. The account-book also records visits by Margaret Fox to her daughter-in-law. Were they friendly visits? In 1677 an attorney was retained "in Mother's business with sister Fell".

Several sources of disagreement are referred to in the following letter:

Gooseyes,

10 April, 1687.

Dear Mother,

We have thine of the 21st of last month, and as to that part which concerns me to answer, I say, as before, £110 per annum is thy due from thy daughter Fell, she having not given thee security for the hundred pounds according to the articles; but whether it be

worth thy while to refuse the £50 for the sake of the other five pounds, for the first half-year, seeing if thou do then thou must bring leases of ejection against all the tenants, and there being so many small ones, it will be a great charge ; of this thou art best able to judge. But she will pay thee nothing during the suit, so that upon the whole my judgment thou hadst better lose the ten pounds a year for peace sake as thou hast done formerly. Thy receiving £50 of her for half a year only binds thee for the time thou so receives it, but thou hast liberty to come in for the £110 per annum for the succeeding years if thou pleases.

As to her stopping the footway to Ulverstone, having been of so long continuence, 'tis thy right and thy family's going from thy house, free egress and regress, as well as theirs, wherefore thou mayst demand it of them as thy right, which will be greatly to her shame and reproach if she refuse it. If she be so perverse as to do so, you had better peaceably suffer it, and go further about than begin a suit which doth but satisfy her quarrelsome mind. However, maintain your right by words and arguments as far as you can with her. And as for her locking up the gates, take witness of it, and demand of her to open them to let you go forth. And if she refuse break open the lock and get the gates opened, taking good witness of what you do and put it in writing with the witnesses' hands to it, for she may as well lock you in your house as stop you from the passage of the gates in and out. But before you break open the lock read this declaration herewith sent thee ; and thou mayst go to the next justice and complain that Friends are kept out of their usual meeting house contrary to the King's command herein mentioned . . .

WILLIAM MEADE

(Abraham MSS. 42.)

Among Abraham MSS. is a written agreement between Hannah Fell and her son Charles Fell on the one side, and the daughters of Judge Fell and their husbands on the

other side, relative to resigning all claims to certain lands. (*Jnl. F.H.S.* xi. 7.)

Charles Fell, the only son of George and Hannah Fell (*Jnl. F.H.S.* xi. 7) was born in the year of his father's death, 1670. As a little seven-year-old boy he seemed to be in favour with his Aunt Sarah, who according to her account-book made him gifts of sweetmeats. He married Mary, daughter of John Brown of the county of Kent, and had only one surviving son, Charles, born in 1693. We have a slight hint of their family life in a letter from Thomas Lower addressed to Margaret Fox, 2nd December, 1693 :

My cousin [nephew] Fell and his brother Graves were in town the last week. The former came to see us but not his brother. His wife is again with child near her time, but come away from his brother Greaves to a cousin's house of his wife's to lie.

Charles Fell is said to have died in the West Indies. His widow married Robert Wilks, the actor. She died in 1741.

Charles Fell the younger (1693-1748) married Gulielma Maria Thomas (1699-1739/40), widow of Aubrey Thomas and daughter of William Penn, Junior, thus uniting two famous Quaker families, but the granddaughter of the proprietor was baptized into another faith in 1724, and her husband was no Friend. They had four children, Mary Margaretta, who married, s.p., John Barron of Leeds and Philadelphia ; Gulielma Maria Frances, who married Rev. John Newcombe[†] of Leire, County Leicester, and had issue ; Robert Edward Fell of London and Philadelphia (baptized 1726 ; will proved 1787) who rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and received in 1770 a grant of arms and died unmarried ; and Springett who died young. Charles Fell is described as " an officer in the army ", and is stated to have been buried at Windsor.

Letters from Charles Fell to John Penn are preserved in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and extracts appear in Howard M. Jenkins's *Family of William Penn*, 1899.

[†] There is more regarding Newcombe in *Notes and Queries*, March 26, 1932.

Writing 8th January, 1739/40, Charles Fell refers to his wife as very ill and able to take only "thin caudle through the spout of a teacup", and on the 17th inst. :

"This morning at one o'clock my dearest Guly left me forever."

On the 22nd :

"My poor dear Guly is this night to be buried in a private but as decent a manner as I am able, in a vault in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster."

And at last, on the 29th :

"I am most unhappy, left greatly in debt, and am obliged to dispose of all my goods, which will be sold next Thursday to satisfy as many as the poor amount of them will come to, but what to do afterwards, God only knows. My poor dear girls are gone this day with their grandmother to Hampton Court in order to have their clothes a little righted up before they go to a school which she has recommended."

The writer has taken a sleeping room at a coffee-house ; he is very anxious for some employment.

Thus ends the male line of Fell of Swarthmoor Hall in sadness and penury.¹

It is believed that the manor of Ulverston was acquired and that Swarthmoor Hall was built by George Fell, of Hawkswell, father of the judge.² He refused a knighthood in 1631 (as also did his great-nephew by marriage, Matthew Richardson). The property descended from father to son, but from the terms of the judge's will the Hall was left to Margaret Fell so long as she remained his widow. Later the Hall became the property of the unmarried daughters, Susanna and Rachel.

April 4, 1671—A pardon unto Margaret Fell alias Fox . . . and likewise his Majesty's grant of the Estate of the said Margaret Fell, alias Fox, unto Susan Fell and Rachel Fell, daughters of the said Margaret . . . (*Cal. S. P. Dom.* 1671. p. 171 ; *Ext.* p. 329.)

¹ A tree connecting Fell of Swarthmoor with the Penns is in *Quakeriana*, ii, 89.

² "I have no doubt that Judge Fell's father bought from the Crown, when, in 1609, much land was sold in Furness."

But George Fell's son Charles must have had some hold upon the estate, for when it was sold to Daniel Abraham, the husband of his aunt Rachel, 8th July, 1691, for £4,500, he received £3,900, £100 being received by each of his uncles.

There is a reference perhaps to this transaction in a letter from Rachel Abraham to her husband, 7 xi. 1694 :

I could be glad thou got something done about the abatement with cousin [nephew] Fell, which he cannot reasonably deny. There was also upon his contract with thee, when thou made the purchase of his estate, £400 and £20, which he articed to allow thee for the payment of his mother's annuity. The £20 he hath never yet allowed. Thou may very justly insist upon it.

(*M. Webb : Fells, from Miller MSS.*)

The estate was sold in 1759, on the break-up of the family, to William Lindon, a merchant of Lancaster, for £7,000, and re-sold for £10,000. The Hall, with some surrounding land, is now occupied by a Fell descendant, Emma C. Abraham, and will eventually become the property of the Society of Friends.

E. C. Abraham wrote in 1932 :

I think that you will be interested to know what led to the final ruin of my unfortunate family and the loss of the Swarthmoor estate.

Soon after I was put into possession of the Hall and the little land still attached to it, in 1913, an elderly man, now dead, showed me his title deed relating to a small piece of land he had bought opposite his house. The deed stated that the land had belonged to John Abraham, who owned the Swarthmoor Hall estate, which he had lost by the bankruptcy of his son, Thomas Abraham (the tobacco merchant at Whitehaven) to whom he had made over his estate "to pay my debts". No doubt this is the transaction referred to in the legal advice that John Abraham had not lost his right to the estate but was advised not to contest the matter; and the unfortunate John A. consequently gave up the property. It must have been a bitter time for the old man.

NOTE ON THE PUBLIC LIFE OF JUDGE FELL

Athenaeum,

Waterloo Place,

October 15, 1842.

Sir,

Mr. Philip Henry Howard having placed in my hands a memorandum relative to some questions proposed by you, with regard to "Thomas Fell" of Lancaster, I have the pleasure of sending you the following, which I trust will convey the information you require :

"Sir Robert Bendlows, Knt., and Thomas Fell, Esq. were elected members of Parliament for Lancaster upon the writ issued October 14, 1645, Sir John Harrison and Sir Thomas Fanshawe being both disabled, the former September 4, 1643, for bearing arms against Parliament, and Sir Thomas Fanshawe disabled September 7, 1642, for neglecting the service of the House and not appearing upon summons.

"Thomas Fell remained in attendance upon the House until the call ordered October 9, 1647, when the committee reported his name among a great number as one of the members absent without excuse, and a fine of £20 was therefore ordered to be levied."

I do not think he ever appeared again. He did not sit in Barebones Parliament ; the members returned for Lancashire then were Col. William West, John Sawrey, Robert Cunliffe.

In Cromwell's second and third Parliament Major Henry Potter sat for Lancaster. In Richard Cromwell's new Parliament Col. William West and Henry Porter, Junior, were returned for Lancaster.

From this it appears to me he disapproved of the course of events in 1647, absented himself, and never appeared in public life again, but a private memoir would tend to verify this suspicion.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

SPENCER HALL, Librarian.

Another letter from the same to the same, October 26, 1842, states that it is not known whether T. Fell was in any previous Parliament to 1645, and suggests that his widow's

statement : " a member of Parliament in many Parliaments," " was hastily written ".¹

There is manuscript authority for the statement that Judge Fell did not approve of the execution of Charles I, and this is confirmed by reference to the good relations which existed between Charles II and Margaret (Fell) Fox and her daughters.

NORMAN PENNEY

¹ From the papers intended by William Benson for a history of the Society of Friends, about 1840. Benson papers in the possession of E. C. Abraham.

Rayner Wickersham Kelsey

We deeply regret to record the death of Rayner W. Kelsey of Haverford College, Pennsylvania, on October 29th, 1934. In him the field of Quaker historical research has had a wise, devoted and highly qualified worker it can ill afford to lose. Rayner Kelsey had been teaching history at Haverford College since 1909 and was Professor of History from 1920 onwards. After the death of Allen C. Thomas in 1920 he took over the editorship of the *Bulletin* of the Friends Historical Association and in 1922 the care of the large collection of Quaker books and MSS. in the Haverford Library. He continued to edit the *Bulletin* until failing health compelled him to relinquish it in 1932; the curatorship of the Quakeriana he continued till his death. Successive librarians of the Society in London have known him as a ready correspondent and unfailing helper in historical and bibliographical enquiries touching American Quakerism. He attended the All Friends Conference in London in 1920. He published *Friends and the Indians*, 1917; *The Centennial History of Moses Brown School*, 1919; besides other works on historical, civic and social questions, almost his latest completed work being the article "William Penn" in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. xiv. A biographical sketch with a portrait and a bibliography is planned for the Spring 1935 issue of the *Bulletin*.