

A Conscientious Objector in the Eighteenth Century

ON April 18th, 1782 James Hastie spent the night in Ballitore, and Mary Shackleton in her diary for that date made the following record.

“ Some anecdotes concerning Jas Hastie gathered from his own mouth.

“ James Hastie was a man well esteemed amongst his fellow soldiers for courage as well as dexterity in the use of arms on which acct he was made Corporal to exercise the Men ; but turning the Scriptures in his mind he saw by the lamp which burns brighter in some hearts than others the inconsistency of bearing arms with the Christian warfare, which resists not evil. When in Waterford he heard that the Methodists were a spiritual people, he went to hear them and liked their manner of worship & discourse but could not find that any favoured the sentiments of most convincing weight with him. Happening to hear of the Quakers, he asked a Methodist Woman what sort of people they were. She said a good sort of people, but had errors as well as others, for they denied baptism & the Lord’s supper, which James then thought essential points. He asked had they any books, she said they had, & good reading in some of them. Soon after, he went to one of their meetings, & after taking off his hat, & using some form of prayer with his face to the crown of it after the manner of the Methodists, sate down, seeing no pulpit, no preacher, he wondered, looking about for some time thought those he saw dressed in black hoods, green aprons etc., must be further advanced in experience, but pitied the young who he thought knew not where to look for good, & thought he could tell them a brave story. In this meeting (I think it was) the text of the Samaritan woman was brought to his mind, & he felt unusual tenderness ; & as he kept a written account of his experience as he had learned from the Methodists to do, he was remarkably favoured in his waiting that day. This meeting was silent, as were several others he went to : at length Susanna Cove appeared in a short

testimony, which he felt to be Truth. Afterwards Thos Wily spoke so directly to his state that he wondered what company Thos had got into to know so much about him. He went afterwards to Thos house but he was not at home, he wrote to him, & Thos appointed a day for him to come & they had a conference. He began now to see he must lay down his arms, & thought of doing it at the parade, but the reasoning part prevailed; & presently the account came that the French were landed at Bantry, & orders to march thither. The thought of taking away a Man's life was distressing to James, but it was made known to him that the account was false, & he resolved that they should not have to say of him that he was a Coward. On their way they were countermanded. In the house they lodged at, there were acquaintances of James drinking & wanted him to partake but he bore his testimony against all superfluity of that kind, & lay on a bed for about two hours. When they returned to Waterford, he went to meeting, but from the march & want of rest grew heavy which grieved him. It was a Qrly meeting, Thos Wily spoke, then Samuel Neale to his state, which roused him, & I think from that time he dropt going to the Methodist meeting. He now resolved upon his sacrifice & instead of going to parade, staid in his Barrack room. The Serjeant came to see what was the reason, & said he must acquaint the Colonel. James said he would have him do so. The Colonel order'd him to the Guard-house, & had him tried by a court-martial, they said he was mad. I think they sent him away to the black hole, denied him pen & ink, & to see his friends, but had him again & sentenced him to receive two hundred lashes which was executed with a whip of small cords, laid on with the strength of a Man, & a fresh Man every twenty five strokes, But he was enabled to rejoice in his sufferings. The soldiers brought him his clothes, washed his back with milk & water, applied dock leaves to it, & wept over him. He bid them not weep for him, but for themselves. The Soldiers' wives came to him with jugs of Tea, & bread & butter, but though he accepted their kindness he refused their refreshment. The next day but one after his whipping, they were to march to Camp; he being swelled & sore, one arm in a sling which he could not have his coat on, his legs came out in red spots, having marched twenty four miles that day, but he got himself bled, which was of much service & soon grew well. He was

closely confined at Camp, & the Colonel told him he would release him, order him to his duty, & upon his refusal try him again, & have him shot ; this Jas fully expected. At length the Colonel told him he would have him put to death before, only for his former regard for him, but he would wait to hear from a gentleman in Norwich (He said he must have £50 or 8 men for his discharge) this gentleman was one of the Gurneys who on writing to the Lord Lieutenant obtained his discharge for which Friends of Waterford subscribed 20 guineas, & honest James by his trade as a Weaver, has been enabled to pay it off."

Other sources show that Waterford Friends had done their best to intercede for James Hastie while in prison.

The reference to the Gurneys is interesting for it is an indication of the inter-relations of Quakerism and industry at the time. The Gurneys were very large importers of wool, and their agent in Ireland for the buying and export of wool from that country was the Quaker firm of Strangman, Watson, & Davis of Waterford. Robert Watson, one of the partners, had been a clerk in Gurneys' employment, so we may surmise that it was through him the Gurneys were asked to bring their powerful influence to bear on the Lord Lieutenant to secure the soldier's release.

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