

Nathaniel Morgan of Ross

IN the days of my youth there hung in the hall of my grandparents' home the portraits of two elderly Friends painted in early Victorian times. They were always referred to as "Uncle and Aunt Morgan," and their memory was revered in particular by my grandmother, whose great uncle and aunt they were, and in whose house in the middle of Ross she had stayed as a girl. Near the portraits stood a beautifully made model of a farm waggon about a foot long, bearing the inscription "Archenfield." Family tradition had it that this model had stood in the back parlour of the Ross and Archenfield Bank in which Nathaniel Morgan was the leading partner, during the panic of 1825-1826 when many banks suspended payment. It had been full of sovereigns, and the saying had got around that "there was a waggon load of gold in the Bank," whereupon confidence was restored among anxious clients fearing for the loss of their deposits.

It was not until I was able to read the four volumes of Nathaniel Morgan's "Private Memorandum Book," which cover the years from 1812 to his death in 1854, that I fully realized what a remarkable life he had led in the little Herefordshire town so far from the main stream of English life. He stands revealed in them as a progressive Friend, a Radical reformer in politics, and a man of singular sweetness of character combined with devotion to humanitarian causes and great public spirit. Above all he was a lifelong pacifist, an enthusiast for the abolition of slavery, and an advocate of mutual tolerance and understanding between the various religious denominations.

He does not record his doings from day to day, but writes on matters or events of consequence to him or about persons whom he thought worthy of record. His fervent religious outpourings were evidently meant for no eyes but his own, yet he refers to his large family circle as if he were writing for posterity, and scarcely ever fails to indicate the relationship to him or his wife of each person mentioned. He is fond of anniversaries, and the memory of his beloved father and of a promising nephew who died young is kept green year by year, as is the story of his first meeting with his wife and of his Bank's signal preservation in 1825 through the guarantee given by ten per-

sons of substance in Herefordshire. For this he never ceased to thank God. He constantly refers to his desire to serve his fellow men to the best of his ability, and to use part of the profits of his banking to help the poor and further the cause of civil and religious liberty. He writes admirable obituaries of his friends and neighbours of both sexes which constitute a portrait gallery of Herefordshire worthies of high or low degree. He records his many difficulties and trials as well as his achievements in the causes which he loved. His political outbursts are often naïve, but are most revealing of his outlook. His friendship with Joseph Hume, the famous Radical M.P., brought him near to the mainsprings of nineteenth-century Liberalism.

The Morgans had been settled in Ross since the reign of Charles II, when Thomas Morgan, a Worcester Friend of the first generation, suffered persecution and decided to change his abode. The family tradition is that on reaching the highest point of the Malvern Hills he was undecided as to where he should go, but agreed with himself that his staff in God's directing hand should guide him. He placed it so that it might have fallen in the direction of either of the church spires visible. It fell towards Ross and thither he directed his steps. In 1683 Thomas Morgan's son, James, was among those distrained upon when, as recorded in Besse's *Sufferings*, three "Justices of the Peace came to the Meeting at Ross, turned out the Persons, lockt up the House and took away the Key so that they were obliged afterwards to meet in the Street." The grandson of this James, bearing the same name, was born in 1733 and married Sarah Baker of Leominster in 1767. Her dove grey wedding dress and flat Leghorn straw hat have been preserved and are now at Friends House. The hat, its brims tied down with a ribbon coalscuttle-wise on either side of the face, seems to have been the prototype of the stiff grey Quaker bonnet of later generations. James and Sarah Morgan's third son Nathaniel was born in 1775. His schooling was in Ross and he seems to have gone at the age of 14 to help his father, whose linen draper's shop and house were in the middle of the town opposite the Market House, on the site where George Fox had held a meeting at James Merrick's in 1667.

Nathaniel Morgan records that he first attended Yearly Meeting in 1798 and then set out on a tour of England with

ministering Friends, covering 914 miles in all. In this year he first spoke in meeting at Leominster "which I did in great fear & found Peace in submitting a few Sentences."

His first portrait painted about this time shows a dark, handsome young man with an amiable expression. In the background appears a picture of Christ crucified between the two thieves, in itself a sign of extreme unorthodoxy in a Friend of those days. Year by year he wrote down his deepest allegiance to the crucified Saviour on "the day called Good Friday."

In 1796 his elder brother Caleb, my ancestor, married Ann Taylor of Ruxton Court, a beautiful timbered farmhouse with a later Elizabethan stone-built wing, in the parish of Llangarren west of Ross. Thus it was that Nathaniel met the Taylor family, who were not Friends. When ill and fearing consumption he went to their home for a change of air—there is a family legend that he was cured by eating Roman snails (*Helix pomatia*), which though common in parts of Oxfordshire are not now found much further west. The truth is that his recovery was due to the tender care and nursing of Sarah, one of the Taylor daughters. They became engaged soon after, but seemed in no hurry to marry. Deborah Darby of Coalbrookdale noticed this and admonished them to take the final step. When they at last did so in 1806 she congratulated them.

[Deborah Darby to Nathaniel and Sarah Morgan]

C[coalbrook] Dale

11th mo. 13th 1806

My Dear Friends,

I am glad to find by my Fd N Ms letter—that you are not only united in the ties of Marriage—but in that of tender affection—whereby I trust you will not only be one anothers Joy—in the Lord—but strengthen each other in the work of your Day—for it is not a Day to live at ease in ceiled houses while the House of God lyes waste—the harvest truly being plenteous but the faithful labourers few—we are called upon not only to pray the great Lord of the Harvest to send forth more faithful labourers—but to put our hand unto the nail—and the right hand as unto the workmens hammer—as the Great Shepherd may condescend to put us forth and go before us. My Dear Friend S.M. has been called into our Society & may she be a blessing not only to her Dear Nathaniel but unto the Church. My best wishes attend you—that you may walk like Zacharias and Elizabeth in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless.

I am with regard your interested Friend,

N & S. Morgan
Ross.

D. DARBY.

It is evident that his travels of 1798 had given young Nathaniel a true understanding of Quaker principles and of the state of the Society. In 1799 he wrote on behalf of his father to the Commissioners of the Income Tax at Ross, "War being inconsistent with the Character of a Christian I cannot comply with the contents of this Bill. All Wars I object to, defensive as well as offensive. Could I give my assent to war I should feel much less objection to comply with this mode of raising money for that purpose than any other yet proposed." The tax thus unpaid, the sum assessed by the embarrassed Commissioners was raised "as Kindly as man could do it" by distraint on household goods.

At the Yearly Meeting of 1813 Morgan upbraided Friends for their lukewarm spirit in the cause of peace, reminding them of their ancient testimony. He alleged that "we have shrunk from that Glorious Cause & Joined with the Nations in Blood, by Assenting to the payment of a Tax, specially Levied for War." One elderly Friend rose to support him, but the clerk allowed no further discussion. After the session he was approached by Joseph Tregelles Price of Neath who "said he had long been uneasy on the same subject & asked me my Motive for opening the matter. I said that it might be brought before the meeting. I nor my Father had never Paid [the war tax] only during the interval of Peace 1801 or 1802.

"I fear my fellow Professors are led by Paltry Interest & fear of offending the High People of this day. I am glad nay greatly rejoice I have endeavoured to keep my hands from Blood in this business & have Publicly avowed my sentiment to them & to the world on this important concern." In the Yearly Meeting of 1814 he spoke again. "I have long believed that war is one of the greatest evils & inconsistencies in the Christian world, and that it is the bounden duty of every Christian peaceably to oppose it, being not only quite contrary to the Language & Life of Jesus Christ, but to every feeling that dignifies human nature. I do, therefore, hope that nothing may cause us to differ on this important subject." Again and again he refers to the scandal of "Professors," whether Friends or no, failing to support the progressive causes which he loved. When peace was proclaimed in June, 1814, he rushed out to the Market House steps opposite his shop. "I shouted & loudly exclaimed 'May it last for Ever &

Ever if there be such a time'." But he was moved to this gesture by the absence from the ceremony of "any persons of known sobriety," a thing "shameful to Professors of Christianity."

In the Yearly Meeting of 1817 Luke Howard took exception to a phrase in one of the foreign (American?) epistles read, in which Friends were called "the peculiar people of Zion," saying that "he believed that many in the Church of Rome and from that Church through all religious Societies down to our own belonged to Zion and had as much right to consider themselves its peculiar favorites." Nathaniel Morgan at once rose to support Luke Howard's "truly correct, just & Liberal observations." When the Epistle was discussed he objected to the words "being Holy in all manner of conversation" saying that "the most plain & simple conversation was of very small import unless our lives did comport therewith."

Morgan was profoundly shocked when, in 1818, a Ross Friend came with the rector and others to solicit his vote for Colonel John G. Cotterell, one of the county members for Herefordshire in the Ministerial interest, who accompanied them. "I told him I wished him well, but that no Quaker could in his conscience vote for a Man of Blood." This incident provoked him to write "Oh may I be preserved on this & Similar occasions to be honest just & true to my convictions even if it be in the most direct opposition to the Judgment or Practice of all the Princes, Priests, Elders or overseers in the World." Following up the same train of thought he noted a few days later, "Oh how shocking to see even the Highest Professors in this little Meeting winking at every iniquity so that they may meet with the applause & approbation of those they call the great."

From a later entry it appears that Ross Friends disapproved of Nathaniel Morgan's venture into banking in 1820. He and his wife were regarded as "speckled Birds," and only when visiting Friends were present does he record satisfaction with the ministry in Ross Meeting. It is significant that no account of his life appeared in the *Annual Monitor* or *British Friend*, and no testimony was sent up by his monthly meeting after his death.

His conception of true worship is well expressed in a letter to a woman Friend who was staying away from meeting.

"I greatly admire & feel the sweet comfort arising from Worshipping God in Silence, to me far beyond all I ever enjoyed amidst the Pomp or Parade of Preaching or Public Teaching. But I also fully believe that saying of Jesus Christ our Lord that where two or three are met together in his name he will be in the midst of them and therefore whether it be in the Church or Chapel, or Meeting house so called, or in a Mountain, it is all the same. But the Spirits must be centred on God alone & not in, or on, Outward or Visible Objects."

Of a monthly meeting he writes:

"I had to read the answers to the Queries respecting do Friends train up their Children Servants & others under their care in a religious life & conversation consistent with our Christian profession, in the frequent reading of the Holy Scriptures, in Plainness of Speech behaviour & apparel. I observed that as far as Plainness of Speech & Behaviour I certainly recommended it & required it to be observed by our Servants let their salary be what it might. I never allowed Sir Maam or Madam Mr. or Mrs. Esquire or Reverend. N.B. These have been my strict sentiments many years notwithstanding I highly object to creeping & cringing, much the case with what poor narrow minded persons among us call the Great ones of our Society."

Greatly moved by Captain Pilkington's Peace lecture in 1834, at which this former Army officer had exposed all the horrors of war and the inconsistency of Christians in supporting it, he penned another *cri de coeur*. "Oh Lord My God, what are Monthly Meetings, Quarterly or Yearly Meetings, what is Plainness of Speech Behaviour or Apparel, what are the Observance of Sundays, Good Fridays, Christmas Days, Christenings, Baptisms or things called Sacraments, compared with preventing the Sorrows, fastings, dying, Wounds & Agonies of thousands who fall on the field of Battle & Millions pining & starving from their dire effects."

In the same year he complained that Friends "have cruelly withheld our Meeting Houses from friendly Persons who differ from us in Religion," and related that this had moved him to present the "Westlyans" with a site for their chapel and to stipulate that any of the Dissenters in Ross were "to have the use of the Chapel at convenient hours free, while their Meeting houses were under repair." He states that Friends' refusal to allow others to use their meeting houses went back to an "act" of Yearly Meeting in 1800 or 1801, against which he had "there loudly testified."

Of the Plymouth Brethren he thought well as "a Sincere People fearing God & most anxiously desiring to be the humble followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who in many particulars seem to be more ardent followers than us who call

ourselves Friends & Quakers, being much more devoted in acts of Charity & self denial than ourselves.”

When in 1837 his brother James' son Joseph married Elizabeth, daughter of his second brother Caleb, Nathaniel Morgan was provoked to another outburst against Friends' practices.

Being Cousins they could not be married at our Meeting,¹ being a disownable offence, [they were married at Dixton Church near Monmouth by a clergyman] whilst Pride, Covetousness & scores of other evils are winked at. Yea a complete abstaining from our Meetings for Worship will not disqualify a person from holding what empty Professors of Religion consider a high & honourable post amongst them. Well might the great Redeemer of Mankind call such Blind Guides straining at Gnats & swallowing Camels.

Oh what a mockery nowadays to see the main principles for which our Pious Patterns George Fox & many of my Dear Ancestors suffered & were ready to die, hardly regarded & yet the Shadow or appearance of Sanctity strongly pleaded for almost every day.

In April, 1838, Nathaniel Morgan attended Peel Meeting in London and was “most painfully affected with the great declension in this Meeting.” Numbers were greatly reduced since his last visit. He went on to indite a fervent plea for greater faithfulness to the Peace Testimony, for co-operation with other Christians, and for refusal to conform to the ways of the world in using flattering titles.

“If we were to simplify our Rules & Queries to these three things & treat all Men as Brethren, then would the Lord Bless us & cause his face to shine upon us as in former Years & we should become a great Blessing in the Earth & I believe many would see & Love our ways & great would be the increase of Truth amongst us, instead of the great falling away of our Society.”

At the end of this passage he refers to the sad fact that there had been only one convincement in South Wales, Herefordshire and Worcestershire during the last five years.

I can only refer very briefly to Morgan's many public activities.² He was regular in his attendance at the Anti-slavery conventions held in Exeter Hall and elsewhere, and wrote with enthusiasm of the part taken at them by Daniel O'Connell, Thomas Clarkson and Joseph Sturge. In 1840 he was indignant at the exclusion from full participation in the

¹ At this time the Book of Discipline laid down that no Monthly Meeting should permit the marriage of first cousins according to Friends' usages. They, therefore, as in this case, had to be married “by a priest”, and were then disowned. This rule was not rescinded by Yearly Meeting till 1883.

² For a fuller account of these see my article in the *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* for 1953.

Convention of Lucretia Mott and her fellow women from America.

“Having felt extremely at these Excellent Women being rejected & prevented advocating this Heavenly Cause for which they had suffered much & laboured long in their own Land, & traversed the Ocean at great expense, & most Anxious that they should have been heard, I felt it my duty to obtain their Names & to Cordially thank them for their blest intentions. Accordingly Lucretia Mott procured their autographs for me and handed them through the hands of James Canning Fuller, a Delegate of New York State.”

When Cobden came to Hereford in 1843 to speak against the Corn Laws, Morgan was present. He proposed his friend Sir Samuel Meyrick of Goodrich Court¹ as chairman and the motion was put by John Southall of Leominster and carried unanimously.

In 1849 Morgan spoke in favour of Cobden's arbitration proposals at a public meeting in Hereford Town Hall, the Mayor taking the chair. “Samuel Bowley of Gloucester spoke Most Nobly for 1 Hour & 50 Minutes & Joseph Morgan My Nephew Seconded one of the Motions in an excellent Manner.”

Other progressive Friends mentioned are John Benbow of Hereford and Samuel Southall of Leominster. For “dear William Allen” Morgan had an unbounded admiration.

The cause of education was one of those nearest his heart. As a very young man he had visited Joseph Lancaster's pioneer school in the Borough at London and from 1799 onwards had done all he could to introduce the “Lancasterian system” in a “British and Foreign School” at Ross. He was one of those who set out successfully to cleanse the Augean stables of misused educational and other foundations. He was fiercely attacked by the champions of vested interests and by intolerant Anglicans, determined if they could to exclude Dissenters from public influence. He championed the newly introduced police in 1839 against those “deeply interested in the Continuance of Disorder in this Town.” He was three times Mayor of Ross and was responsible for the introduction of gas lighting and for an important road diversion between Ross and Hereford to avoid a steep hill which occasioned much suffering to horses and driven cattle.

He was active, too, in the agitation against Church tithes levied on Dissenters and in that for the reform of the corpora-

¹ Two charming letters from Sir S. Meyrick to N. Morgan have been preserved in which he “thees and thous” his Quaker friend. Meyrick had been knighted by William IV as a great authority on and collector of armour.

tions. On behalf of the latter he forwarded a petition signed by Ross citizens to Lord Brougham. "My friends here are emboldened to trouble thee from having for many, many years known thee to be the steady & unflinching friend of the oppressed of every Rank, colour & Clime." After his copy of this letter he has pasted a cutting from a newspaper of Brougham's hymn "'There is a God', all nature cries."

I will end by a quotation from an obituary notice of Nathaniel Morgan in the *Hereford Times* of 11th November, 1854, which speaks for itself. "His obsequies were marked by a significant proof of the esteem in which he was held; the shops were closed and business was suspended. Many along the route of the procession shed tears, and we observed men of all shades of religion and politics in the funeral group. We were once without a town clock, a fire escape, a brigade engine, a British and Foreign School; we have them now. The deceased contributed with others to their obtainment."

JOHN STURGE STEPHENS

Research in Progress

WINIFRED M. WHITE, 65 St. Mildred's Road, Lee, London, S.E. 12, is engaged on a study of the Christian contribution to the treatment of mental illness during the past one hundred and fifty years, to be submitted as a thesis in B.A. (Honours) in the department of theology at Nottingham University.

The Bulletin of Friends Historical Association, vol. 41, no. 2, Autumn number, 1952, includes an article on Quakerism in Danzig, edited from the manuscript of the late William I. Hull, by Henry J. Cadbury, articles on the Yearly Meetinghouse at Mount Pleasant, Ohio (by Ellen Starr Brinton), on the founding of Whittier College in California, and the second portion of John Forbes's study of American Friends and Russian relief, 1917-1927.

The January, 1953 issue of *The Pennsylvania Magazine* includes reviews by Thomas E. Drake and Richmond P. Miller of Penn's *Irish Journal* and *Embattled Maiden: the Life of Anna Dickinson*—the nineteenth century "Queen of the Lyceum", who was born a Philadelphia Quaker, and a short notice of the revised edition of George Fox's *Journal*.