

A "Guarded" Education, and "Evangelical" Christianity

Two Letters from John Eliot Hodgkin, 1907

TWO letters which recently came into the possession of Leeds University Library with the purchase of a set of Eliot Hodgkin's *Rariora* (3 vols., 1902) are worth recording for the ray of light they shed on the upbringing of children in a well-concerned Quaker family in the first half of the last century. They are the more frank and revealing, coming from a man of 77 who can recall youthful contacts and walks and essay clubs with his "oldest friend," of 91 years of age.

The writer, John Eliot Hodgkin (1829-1912), eldest son of John Hodgkin of Tottenham, barrister-at-law (1800-75), and Elizabeth (daughter of Luke, *F.R.S.*) Howard, was brother of Thomas Hodgkin the banker and historian, and of Mariabella, wife of Sir Edward Fry, and Elizabeth ("Bessie"), wife of Alfred Waterhouse, the architect. He was an art collector, and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. His interests were very wide, as is revealed in *Rariora*, in the calendar of his papers published by the Historical Manuscripts Commission (1897), and in the volume on English pottery of the seventeenth century which he published in 1891.

The recipient, whose copy of *Rariora* the University of Leeds has now acquired, was Theodore Compton (1816-1909), a well-known Winscombe Friend for half a century. In his early manhood in London, Theodore Compton was intimate with the Hodgkin family at Tottenham, and his diary named John Hodgkin as one of his three best friends at this period in secular and religious affairs. There is an account of his life in the *Annual monitor* for 1910. His lively mind, wide interests in literary, religious and scientific matters, and an outlook which led him to sit loose on orthodoxy (which is reported to have prevented his being placed on the Sidcot School committee), evidently made a lasting impression on at least one member of the Hodgkin household.

That there was a firm streak of independence in the

Compton family, has been brought to my attention by Edward Milligan. He points out that Theodore Compton's father Townsend (1778-1834) was a son of Thomas (1749-1817) and Mary Compton, and it was in their household that Hannah Barnard was so cordially made welcome during the proceedings against her in the Yearly Meeting of 1801. Thomas Compton also stood by his son-in-law John Foster at Yearly Meeting in 1816 during his appeal against disownment for advocating views which were supposedly unitarian.¹

There is a striking, and in some respects complementary, account of education in the Hodgkin family in the first chapter of Louise Creighton's *Life and letters of Thomas Hodgkin*, which fills out the account given in the first letter.

R.S.M.

The Woodlands, 278 Upper Richmond Road, Putney.

ix.10.07.

Dear Theodore Compton,

It was very pleasant to receive through Bessie² your kind remembrance and little commentary, and to find that perhaps our oldest friend is still well and happy. We have I think exchanged letters *once* since the days of our youth.

Bessie's remembrances, at any rate of the celebrated Rasselas competition seem to be more definite than mine, for she avers that I *wept* because you gave Tommy³ the prize. What astounding stuff he must have written! for although we were being well grounded in Classics, English literature was a sealed book to us. Ours was in many ways a curiously cramped education.

The fear that we should by any chance read any fiction, the endeavour—a very futile one, to keep us in a garden enclosed, the absurd view that the making broad our hats and our phylacteries would keep us apart from a sinful world—these were all part of a now happily departed phase of Quaker education. I do remember that I, always the black sheep who wanted to get out of the fold, liked *you* because in my small way I thought you were “in the world.” I mind me of your explaining to us, I think on a walk to Clay Hill⁴

¹ T. Compton, *Recollections of Spitalfields*, 1894, pp. 34-45.

² Elizabeth Waterhouse.

³ Thomas Hodgkin.

⁴ Clay Hill, Enfield.

what a pun was, and always thought you somehow connected with Theodore Hook, of whom I suppose you must have told us, we could never have heard of so worldly a person from any one within the fold. I have always wondered how my Father a man of such intelligence and power of mind *could* have imagined that such a constricted manner¹ of life was likely to form a preparation for a future² which had after all to be passed in contact with the dreadful "world". But the training seems to have answered in the case of the other three, who were *born* good. It was emphatically bad for me.

I have thought that you might conceivably like to see in what channels my tastes have run, and so, following Tom's good example, I am going to inflict on you, if you will allow me the pleasure of doing so, a copy of my most recent production, & am instructing my binder to forward you a set³ of my "Rariora" for your kind acceptance. I make no claim to literary ability. "Rasselas" showed that that was not to be my forte, but I have some little taste for *odd* things, as you will doubtless discover.

With my best wishes for the prolongation of your happy & peaceful life,

Believe me

Ever your affectionate

Young friend

JOHN ELIOT HODGKIN

The Woodlands, Upper Richmond Rd., Putney. ix. 22.1907

Dear Theodore Compton,

You will I trust pardon the delay in acknowledging your most welcome present. I spent last Sunday mainly in the perusal of portions of your three volumes, each of which had for me a separate interest. William Cookworthy⁴ (whose 2↓ signifies tin) I have in measure mastered. Clowes⁵ is of course stiffer reading, and set me on to cogitations about Swedenborg whose "Heaven & Hell" is the only treatise

¹ altered to: "that so constricted a manner."

² "life" deleted, and "future" substituted for it.

³ "copy" deleted, and "set" substituted for it.

⁴ T. Compton, *William Cookworthy* (1895).

⁵ T. Compton, *The life and correspondence of the Reverend John Clowes* (1874); 2nd edition (1882); 3rd edition (1898).

I have read. Controversial Theology and Exegesis have for many years been favourite subjects with me. I have been an avid reader of expositions of views of various tendencies. On the whole I have found that the particular faith of my fathers seems to have the most to recommend it. I mean the faith as expounded by Barclay, rather than that of the later "Evangelical" Friends. But the older I grow the more strongly do I feel that God does not judge us by our ability to receive any particular tenet, that R. Catholic, Unitarian, Quaker, Jew, Mohammedan, Buddhist, Brahman, are all partakers in His divine love, and that the cleverest and most pious man can only have the vaguest conception of the actual truth, and that we must be guided by a childlike faith in His mercy and love to us all. I pray to be guided to believe whatever God would have me believe, & feel inclined to adopt the spirit of Queen Elizabeth's creed about the Sacrament.

"Christ was the Word & spake it. He took the Bread and brake it, and *what that Word doth make it, That I believe* and take it."

I shall greatly enjoy the "Mendip Valley",¹ a book after my own topographical heart. "Country Contents" are beyond my opportunities, but I greatly appreciate their historians.

With renewed thanks
and kindest wishes
I am

Your affe. young friend
J. ELIOT HODGKIN

¹ T. Compton, *A Mendip Valley* (1892).