

Holland's Welfare

THE recent death of Henry J. Cadbury has led me to re-read the remarkable story of his great-grandfather John Warder, born 1751, died 1828. As an outstanding example of the way in which Friends of that time maintained unswervingly and unremittingly their testimony against war it is worth recording again.

John Warder, though born in America, was in 1781 a merchant in England and a member of Devonshire House Monthly Meeting. He was the owner, jointly with a Captain Samuel Smith, of a trading vessel called the *Nancy*, which in this year set sail from London to New York. Without John Warder's knowledge Captain Smith had not only fitted out the *Nancy* with 12 guns, but had also taken out Letters of Marque in its name. These, under the international law of the time, which was only altered in 1856, entitled the *Nancy* to act as a privateer and commit acts of piracy against merchant shipping belonging to enemy subjects.

Included among "enemies" at this date was Holland, by reason of its having recognized the independence of the United States. When therefore the *Nancy*, in conjunction with another armed British merchantman, encountered a Dutch ship on her homeward voyage from the East Indies to Amsterdam, they attacked and captured her, and brought her into Limerick for repair. The name of the Dutch ship, translated into English, was *Holland's Welfare*.

At what stage John Warder learnt of these un-Quakerly proceedings by a vessel owned partly by him, does not appear, nor what action he then took to get rid of his part ownership. What is clear is that as soon as he heard that he had acquired an interest in the valuable Dutch cargo, he insured this at Lloyds, a prudent action as it turned out, for on the voyage back from Limerick to London the *Holland's Welfare* was caught in a storm and went to the bottom, with all her cargo. John Warder thereupon claimed and was paid the insurance, a net amount of £1,833.

At this stage the Monthly Meeting, through their overseers, began their long involvement in the affair. As the

official record has it, "a concern was awakened that any one of their number should obtain an advantage from proceedings which so obviously compromised our testimonies against the lawfulness of war". John Warder was visited and, after the probable alternative of disownment had been mentioned, agreed to place the insurance money under the control of Friends, so that if any claims were made against him by the Dutch owners of the ship and cargo these could be satisfied. He stipulated however that if no claims were made within a stated period the money should revert to him. In the event no claimants appeared, clearly because no sustained efforts were made to trace any, and the fund was handed back to John Warder.

The Monthly Meeting, however, was far from satisfied. In their judgement, to quote the record again, "no stipulation as to time could bar the Christian obligation for restitution of any property wrongfully acquired, and therefore when (in about 15 months after his having resumed possession of the Stock) John Warder applied to the Monthly Meeting for a certificate to Friends in Philadelphia (whither he was about to sail on a visit), he found that the fact of his not having restored the money for the prize was an effectual obstacle to any such document being granted by the Meeting on his behalf". This meant, in terms of Quaker usage at the time, that his status among Friends in Philadelphia would be something approaching a pariah. Nevertheless, he did leave England, ultimately settling in America, and a frustrating period of 15 years ensued, during which Friends both in London and Philadelphia continued indefatigably to urge John Warder to take further steps to make restitution of the money, and he continued to maintain that it was impossible to do so, and unreasonable to expect him to try. Eventually a compromise was reached, whereby it was agreed that he should not be expected to make any effort himself to trace the rightful owners, but would authorize the Monthly Meeting to do so if they could, and would accordingly re-transfer the fund to trustees under the terms of a Trust Deed. This, finally executed in 1799, provided for the payment of the just claims of any claimants who could be found, and if this proved impossible then that the Monthly Meeting should apply the fund "in such way and manner as they shall think most consistent with the principles

of justice and equity". The Monthly Meeting then at last felt free to forward to Philadelphia its Certificate of Christian Fellowship on behalf of John Warder.

Unfortunately the period of the Napoleonic Wars now commenced, and for many years communication with the Continent was impracticable. But the Monthly Meeting remained undaunted and unsatisfied. As soon as the wars were over, attempts to trace the owners were begun, and advertisements setting out the facts were inserted in all the principal Dutch newspapers. Claims began to come forward for investigation, and in 1818, 37 years after the capture of the *Holland's Welfare*, the Monthly Meeting was able to record that out of the £1,833 placed on trust, plus the large amount of accrued interest added to it, between three and four thousand pounds had been paid out, and there was still a balance of more than the original £1,833 remaining to be applied, under the terms of the Trust Deed, according to the Meeting's judgement of the principles of justice and equity.

What were these? Should the money be refunded to John Warder, or alternatively, be employed for some good purpose within the Monthly Meeting? No, the conscience of the Meeting was still not satisfied. The wrong had been done to persons of Dutch nationality, and it was therefore only just and equitable that Dutch nationals should be the beneficiaries. For some years longer no practicable proposition to implement this was forthcoming, but in 1824 the situation was changed as the result of a visit to England by Jean Etienne Mollet.

John Stephen Mollett,¹ as he was known here, was a Dutchman, a silk-merchant by trade, who had lived in several continental cities, including the Paris of the Revolution, before settling in Amsterdam. He was the last survivor of the once flourishing Society of Friends in Holland, and there was to be a long gap before there were to be Dutch Friends again. Peter Bedford is said to have introduced him to a visitor with the words: "Thou seest before thee the whole Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meeting of Friends in Holland." Mollett, while in England,

¹ For J. S. Mollett see *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, v, p. 125.

had occasion to visit the Infant School then recently established in Spitalfields. He was much struck by it, and expressed the view that a similar school in Amsterdam would meet a real need. The suggestion was carefully examined and approved by the Monthly Meeting, and after some further delay, occasioned partly by a final bid by John Warder's executors to recover the fund, a suitable house, in Bereenstraat, off Keizersgracht, was acquired, and the School was opened in 1829. In memory of the Dutch vessel, which had foundered nearly half-a-century earlier, the School was named "Holland's Welfare", and when it was re-built in 1864, with money largely subscribed by English Friends, a model of a full-rigged ship was placed on the peak of the roof and over the front doorway.

Stephen Grellett, who paid several visits to the School, expressed the view that "no more powerful peace sermon could have been preached than that embodied in these circumstances". What is particularly impressive about the story is the way in which a Monthly Meeting, with its constantly changing membership and leadership, retained till the end its steadfast concern for the right use of the money wrongfully acquired by one of its members, never acting in haste, dealing patiently with all its difficulties, the lukewarmness of John Warder, the inaccessibility of the continent, the absence of any suitable project, and finally, with no doubt many sighs of relief, discharging its self-imposed duty, then nearly fifty years old.

NOTE.—The chief source for the above is the booklet on "The Warder Trust" compiled for Devonshire House Monthly Meeting from M.M. minutes and records; it is undated, but Joseph Smith's *Descriptive catalogue of Friends' books*, 1867, i. 750, gives 1859 as the date, and William Beck as compiler. The story, in abbreviated form, has often been re-told subsequently, but only the 1859 booklet gives the full details of the Meeting's long "labouring" with its member.

ALFRED W. BRAITHWAITE