

Friends Quarterly Examiner, 1878. Vol. XII.

"THE THOMPSONS OF COMPTON" By W. C. Westlake, Part I p. 104.

"THE THOMPSONS OF COMPTON" By W. C. Westlake, Part II p. 272.

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THE  
FRIENDS'  
QUARTERLY EXAMINER;

A

Religious, Social, & Miscellaneous Review.

CONDUCTED BY

MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

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NUMBERS XLV. TO XLVIII.—VOL. XII.

1878.



LONDON:

BARRETT, SONS & CO., SEETHING LANE, E.C.

YORK: WILLIAM SESSIONS, LOW OUSEGATE.

PHILADELPHIA: ALICE LEWIS.

Per. 11141. e. 5  
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Extract from "The Thompsons of Compton.—Part I". W. C. Westlake p. 104

In the Friend obituary of Eighth Month 1877 appeared a brief notice of the decease at very advanced ages of the two surviving brothers of this estimable family who during three generations resided at the village of Nether Compton in the county of Dorset and where for nearly a century they exerted a widespread influence for good amongst the population around them as well as upon the religious Society of which since its rise in 1652 the family have been attached and valuable members Seventh Month 25th 1877. At No 9 Brunswick Place Southampton Edward Thompson in his 91st year Seventh Month 27<sup>th</sup>. At Hitchin John Thompson only surviving brother of the above in his 80th year They were lovely

and pleasant in their lives and in death they were not divided In offering a few reminiscences of these two valued Friends and of their worthy predecessors we desire to show forth the practical influence of genuine Christian principles in the ordinary every day duties of life and to show how much may be accomplished without being endowed with any special genius or talent by consistent Friends who are concerned in steadily upholding everything that is useful and beneficial in the localities in which they reside. Their grandfather Jonah son of Isaac and Hannah Thompson of Penrith was at fourteen years of age apprenticed to a weaver at Kendal He was a lad of great intelligence and promise and his father's family who were in an affluent position were desirous of bringing him up to the Church but as the Testimony issued at his death informs us He had the fortitude to withstand offers which were repeatedly made him when about the age of fourteen of an education at school and the University with a view to qualify and provide for him as a minister of the established worship which is the more remarkable as at that time his mind was strongly attached to literary acquirements yet as he frequently remarked he was even then fully convinced of the impropriety of such mode of making ministers believing none could be truly so but those of Christ's making. A serious illness prevented him from serving out his time but after his recovery he was on the point of setting up in his trade when he was offered the superintendence of a school at from whence he removed to Yatton in Somerset. On his marriage in 1735 to Mary Beaton about thirty three years of age he removed his to the village of Nether Compton in where for a period of between seventy and years it was successfully carried on It was the principal school for Friends in the South of England in the record kept of some 500 scholars the well names of Ball Fry Gregory Tuckett Fox Tregelles Stephens Clark Fowler John Allen and other of England families abound as well as of many London Friends including John Bell JJ Lister other notable Friends of a past generation. Although essentially a Friends school it was such high repute for sound teaching and religious moral training that many boys who had no with the Society of Friends were educated there including the sons of the village squire and of the neighbouring gentry who esteemed the character and Christian integrity of its proprietors. Jonah Thompson was also an eminent minister the gospel in the Society of Friends. At the age twenty six he accompanied William Longmire on gospel visit to most of the counties in England also frequently travelled with his beloved friend and counsellor Samuel Bownas who at his death to him his saddle and bridle with the proviso that they were to be worn out in travelling on the same gospel services. In 1750 leaving a family of six little children and his school placed under the care of his head teacher and his exemplary wife he went on a religious visit to America. This long parting was an occasion of deep trial to both as is evidenced by the letters extant Whilst waiting to embark he wrote to his beloved wife in words which will we doubt not strike a sympathetic chord in those who have been similarly circumstanced London 3rd of First Month 1780. This after the salutation of my dear love to thee and thy whole family comes to inform thee that I got well to London on First day morning and am at present pretty well in health. I sold my mare to a Friend of Fordingbridge yesterday morning for six guineas so that I am freed from the trouble of looking after her I hope thou wilt use thy best endeavour to give me up freely to the guidance and protection of that Arm of Power that can and I humbly trust will bring us together again to our mutual satisfaction. Our parting was the hardest trial I have met with from my youth to this day. The Monthly Meeting of Sherborne to which he belonged seems at that time to have been very deficient in well educated members. There being no one apparently capable of the literary effort of drawing up the usual certificate for religious service abroad he was requested to do so himself and the result was a very modestly worded certificate in his own handwriting which still exists amongst the family archives He visited most of the meetings in the different provinces of America and that his labours in the work of the ministry were of eminent service and generally acceptable appears from the abundant testimony of Friends in those parts most of which however through modesty he declined to make public or to present to the meetings to which they were directed. He was not an unfrequent attender at the London Yearly Meeting and a Friend writing of that held in 1765 thus describes his ministry All which was delivered by that venerable ancient man in such a moving plain and simple manner accompanied with such energy and affecting sweetness as revived in my mind that sublime Scripture expression of the morning stars singing together and the sons of God shouting for joy The following extract from a sermon preached by him at the Yearly Meeting at Bristol and taken down in shorthand may convey something of his habitual attitude of mind as well as a seasonable lesson for the present generation of Friends Let us consider ourselves but as pilgrims and strangers upon the

earth We have no assurance of tomorrow but are hastening through time to eternity and a little provision sufficeth for our journey We ought therefore to have a reasonable and Christian indifference to the rest and not suffer our minds to be too much employed in a pursuit of such transitory enjoyments as these here below Let us therefore have a Christian indifference to whatsoever is more than sufficient for our accommodation in our way through time to eternity Three years before his death he was by the decease of his wife deprived as the Testimony informs us of an endeared helpmeet who was a bright example of Christian perfection. After an illness of some months duration borne with great composure and resignation he departed this life in Fifth Month 1780 aged nearly seventy eight years and a minister about fifty five years. William Rawes a former pupil thus writes concerning him In the arduous station of a schoolmaster he gave universal satisfaction to all the lovers of truth in the simplicity thereof educating the youth under his tuition with such steady care and lovingkindness as much endeared his memory to the soberminded amongst them in their more advanced years who with gratitude reflect on the diligence wherewith he instructed them in useful literature his watchful solicitude for their welfare his constant endeavours to preserve their tender minds from the manifold snares of evil and the sweetness of love that often flowed from him in his unremitting attention to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord He was a man of extensive abilities adorned with great humility and charity in good esteem among Friends and others a promoter of peace amongst his brethren and frequently serviceable in his neighbourhood in various respects His life and conversation being consistent with the doctrines he preached seemed fully to evince that he had attained what he had frequently to advise others to seek after viz a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man and that tractability of mind which to use his own expression is not easily disturbed by temporary accidents His ministry was in the demonstration of the spirit and of power and generally acceptable to people of various denominations he being often led on public occasions to declare the truths of the Gospel in a plain doctrinal manner with that calmness and deliberation so peculiar to him with such convincing clearness as frequently occasioned many to acknowledge the truth of his doctrine. Concerning his six children who were trained up in this happy secluded Dorsetshire village we may add that the confidence with which he was enabled to entrust them to his heavenly Father's care when called away on religious service was abundantly blessed and realised in their after career. Of his three daughters the eldest Mary married Thomas Westcombe, Sarah was married to Alexander Neave and Ann the youngest to Daniel Roberts the descendants of whom are still known and honoured amongst us for their work's sake. Of the three sons, the eldest Samuel died shortly after reaching his twenty first year, and the second John was sent over by his father to America in 1770 when twenty six years of age. For some time he followed the profession of his father and was occupied in superintending a school of Anthony Benezet's for the training of Friends children. He was married to a grand daughter of Thomas Chalkley and afterwards became a general merchant at Philadelphia, where his numerous descendants of the Thompson, Morris, and Lewis families still reside. The earnest desire and prayer of the father that this wide separation should not lessen the family tie which bound his children together has been remarkably fulfilled and the broad Atlantic rolling between them proved no obstruction to their abiding domestic affection In writing to his brother Thomas in 1801 thirty one years after leaving England John says Present my love to all my connections as opportunity offers and inform them I often think of them with much affection and sincerely wish the same affection may continue between our children though they may be stationed in different parts of the world It is an interesting fact that through the late John Thompson of Hitchin and John James Thompson late of Philadelphia all matters of interest national social and domestic have been diligently forwarded from each side including we may add a regular forwarding of the Friends Examiner and other periodicals, and thus by a continuous and lively correspondence the good old tie of blood relationship had not become lax through this long century of absence. Well would it be if the same unceasing fondness and personal interest existed amongst every family whose members have migrated to a foreign soil or distant colonies. We will now continue the narrative concerning Thomas, the youngest son and successor to his father's school at Compton. He was born in 1746 and was but four years old when his father went to America. He appears early to have taken to the scholastic profession and soon became an efficient teacher relieving his father gradually in the practical working of their large establishment which included a farm and malting in addition to the school premises. In 1782 two years after his father's death he was married to Ann Gregory of Yatton who proved herself an inestimable partner wisely

caring for her own household beloved by all and filling a most useful place amongst the poor and rich around. In a letter written shortly after her marriage she thus feelingly describes the place and its surroundings: I find Compton very agreeable and suitable to my disposition. It is a pleasant retired village which is more pleasing to me than a more populous situation. I hope if favoured with life and health, we shall go on comfortably. It is a very lonely spot as to Friends, which at times is discouraging, and when I look at the bright examples we succeed, I cannot but tremble but I hope the good hand that led them on to the comfortable close of life will preserve us.

Ann Thompson was a most watchful mother over her children notwithstanding the large claims upon her time and thoughts in the management of the school of which she was the efficient caretaker and domestic superintendent She displayed a personal interest in the welfare of each individual boy and had the happiness and joy of seeing afterwards the fruits of her tender religious concern for their welfare evidenced in the noble and useful lives of many of the Compton scholars. Of her it may emphatically be said in the words of the wise man, "She looketh well to the ways of her household and eateth not the bread of idleness." Her children arise up and call her blessed, her husband also and he praiseth her. Many of her letters are preserved; they show the sweetness and gentle humility of her character and that in the midst of a busy life and many cares, her soul rested in the Lord and that her unceasing desire was to be doing the day's work while it was day. Not long before her death she thus writes "I often check myself when over anxious about my children with the consideration of the great uncertainty of my staying with them even to see the wants of their infant and helpless years supplied. Future events are in great mercy and kindness hid from our sight and as we are exercised in the performance of present duties in our different stations and allotments the more we shall be enabled to leave all to the wise disposal of the Almighty and in humility and fear hope that some friendly care will be extended to our dear children if we should be taken from them while they are young in years."

She died at the age of forty six leaving eight children, the youngest of whom was but three years of age. The confidence displayed in her simple trust in an Almighty helper was very beautifully fulfilled concerning her children who were for years under the affectionate care of Sarah Westcombe, afterwards the wife of the late Stanley Pumphrey of Worcester. In Hutchins History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset appears the following notice under the head Nether Compton 1819. In speaking of distinguished persons who have lived in or been connected with this parish, it is but justice to the memory of a most excellent woman to record the name of Mrs. Ann Thompson, wife of Mr. Thomas Thompson, of whom it has been justly said by those who knew her well and are desirous to perpetuate the remembrance of her work, that she was to the poor their faithful counsellor sincere friend and kind physician and much promoted the education of their children in her several relations of neighbor, mother, and wife, truly exemplary as a Christian sincerely upright and pious and devout without bigotry and without enthusiasm. The good sense and amiable disposition the suavity and urbanity of her manners which would have graced any situation endeared her to all around and occasioned her death to be very generally lamented. After having endured for several days a very painful disease with the patience fortitude resignation of a Christian, she meekly resigned her soul her Maker's hands on February 10th 1802 in her forty year. Her funeral in the burial ground belonging to Society of Friends at Yeovil of which she was attended by the greatest concourse of people of all persuasions ever remembered at that place on an occasion. It may occur to some that this description of godly woman, Friend, a century ago is unduly eulogistic and might well have been omitted but those appreciate this bright picture who remember marvelous influence for good which has often exercised by matrons of this superior type in districts where they have held an independent, admirable position between the little and the great in friendly relation to the Squire at the Hall, and to poorest of the hamlet extending sympathy counsel and judicious aid on every side and well versed not in their physical needs and family sorrows but also the village doctress wisely prescribing for their bodily ailments a kind and judicious friend ever hand and always accessible to the very weakest lowliest. We feel forcibly that the type is worth recording in these pages and that the excellent Thompson was one of a class once numerous in a country locality though now from changed circumstances, too rarely to be found. The quiet homestead gives place to the town dwelling and the thoughtful and genial benevolence of the old fashioned country Friends is superseded by if not lost in the and busier atmosphere of the crowded city. The

picture of the home life of the Compton family handed down to us is so full of sweetness and graphic beauty that at the risk of a further suspicion of over colouring, we cannot refrain from sketching it a little more in detail

Thomas Thompson writes William Ball one of his very few surviving scholars was a most amiable and venerable man. Of course he seemed to me to be an old man but might not then be more than about sixty. He had a slight impediment in his speech but not more than made his delivery necessarily deliberate and in his fine tones interesting and impressive. He was invariably kind and though such a portly and dignified figure always most indulgent to the little ones especially and beloved by all. He was a valued Elder and much esteemed in his own meeting of Dorset and Hants. Compton was a school in which the comforts of the boys were provided upon an almost lavish scale and it stood high in days which it must be owned were not fruitful of superior schools among Friends. In the life of Dr. Young one of the most celebrated of his pupils and the decipherer of the Rosetta Stone we get the following glimpse of the school. His diary says In March 1782 when nearly nine years of age I was sent to the school of Mr. T. Thompson at Compton in Dorsetshire where I continued for nearly four years. Mr. Thompson was a man of liberal and enlarged mind who possessed a tolerable collection of English and classical books which his pupils were allowed to make use of. It was his custom likewise to allow them a certain degree of discretion in the employment of their time. The following is the list of books which I read with Mr. Thompson in the school. Here follows a long list of Latin and Greek books. The usher of the school was a very ingenious young man of the name of Josiah Jeffery who was in the habit of lending me books and amongst them Martin's Lectures on Natural Philosophy and Ryland's Introduction to the Newtonian Philosophy. Some Greek and Latin books were sold to me by Mr. Thompson at extremely low prices and likewise Montanus's Hebrew Bible for which I gave five shillings and before I left Compton School I had succeeded in getting through six chapters. Life pp 5 8

It is pleasant to reflect that the tastes of this great discoverer and scholar were thus fostered under the roof of Thomas Thompson and an impetus given in early life which landed Dr. Young amongst the greatest literati of his day It must not be supposed that even in a Friends school in a remote country village the world and all its passions and temptations were excluded There was always writes an old scholar rather a loose rein in connection with generous if not always judicious indulgence at this popular school and it is certain that wars and rumours of wars were current even in this abode of peace. One tale of special zest was told to my juvenile ears amongst the Compton exploits of a pitched battle with another school not of Friends some miles off in which much strategy of concealment from the excellent Thomas Thompson and his ushers no less than that of management in the field of battle were displayed, and in which one boy afterwards the well-known General Church, was I think conspicuous if not anticipating his generalship. Another boy at Compton was Llewellyn Lloyd, who afterwards attained considerable fame as a Nimrod the world over, and the author of Wild Sports in the West and other adventures. Compton was situated three miles from the nearest Friends Meeting house at Sherbourne whither Thomas Thompson was in the habit of taking the boys on First days in preference to holding a separate meeting for worship in their own village, although ministering Friends travelling that way often held such meetings there. The distance entailed the use of conveyances for many of the boys and the whole company formed a striking cavalcade as they wended their way weekly along the pleasant country lanes and hedgerows. Besides the carriage and saddle horses of the Thompson family which were distinct there was a roomy sort of Coburg, a brown accommodating close carriage always called the sociable in which the boys were thickly stowed and also an open double seated phaeton drawn by a pair of strong donkeys which the boys who occupied this favourite vehicle drove for themselves.

In all a goodly turnout and such as one as would in this day carry our thoughts rather to transatlantic scenes than to a first class English Friends seminary in this land. The scenery around Compton is very rich and wooded with running brooks and beautiful meadows and orchards in which grew the far famed apples. The house or at least part of it is still standing. It would assuredly not meet the requirements of the present day. The ways of the place would doubtless appear very simple and primitive to our modern tastes but each pupil was lovingly cared for and individually watched over and received there a solid education coupled with a very conscientious training which has borne fruit abundantly in

the several generations which have now all but passed away. But we will now turn from these descriptive details of the school to the peaceful home life of the family itself.

Thomas Thompson was married a second time in 1808 to Anna Rawes, nee Fox, who proved a valued helpmeet and an affectionate and kind caretaker to his children in whose best welfare she took a warm interest. In 1809, the youngest son Lawson, who is described as a fine open hearted boy and of a very precocious mind who had already shown at this early age a remarkable taste for the classics, and who was in his father's fond hopes destined to be a scholar as well as a schoolmaster, died of measles in his tenth year, and Lawson's orchard with its limpid stream is now the only remaining relic of this dearly cherished boy.