Some Anecdotes of John Woolman

Recorded by JOHN COX

IN the Dillwyn Parrish Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania is a MS. entitled *Sketches and Recollections of prominent Friends & Historic Facts, 1845-1846*. It is in the handwriting of John Cox, of Oxmead Farm near Burlington, who was born at Moorestown in 1754, and it certainly is his own composition. The following are the paragraphs which deal with John Woolman.

<div align="right">HENRY J. CADBURY.</div>

I recollect John Woolman very well. He lived at Mount Holly and attended that meeting when I went to school.

When his mind became exercised on the subject of slavery he found it his place to speak of its enormities in the Yearly Meeting when the minds of but very few friends were prepared to receive his testimony. When he first relieved his exercised mind in this way, he was after publicly reproved. When this was the case, he would sit down and weep without attempting any justification. In the course of a few years his concern found a place in the minds of his friends generally and the Society was enabled to wash their hands from the guilt of slave holding.

When Clerk of the Quarterly Meeting held at Burlington the Meeting directed a minute to be prepared which he was not easy to make. He signified his desire to be excused from it and said he would leave the table for some other friend to do it. Some one hastily said, The Clerk need not *fly* from the table. John Woolman quietly rejoined, " The clerk has no wings."

His son-in-law Stephen Comfort who resided with him for some years related to me the following anecdotes.

They once went into the orchard to inspect the apple trees. S.C. remarked to his father in law. *There* is a tree *full* of caterpillars. John Woolman in his quiet way remarked—" not quite full." S.C. determined to watch and endeavour to discover in his father-in-law some inaccuracy of expression, but was never able to detect him in any expression that was not strictly and literally true.

When they were engaged in cutting down the harvest John Woolman discovered blood on his scythe and found

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he had killed some animal concealed in the grain. Such was his distress that he called off his laborers to assist him in making search for it. The circumstance affected him so deeply that he did not recover from the pain it occasioned for a considerable term afterwards.

John Woolman's widow used to come and spend several days at a time with us, and delighted to talk of Johnny as she frequently called him. When he was about to embark for Europe he went to Philadelphia to look at the ship to see whether he would feel easy to embark in her. He finally felt satisfied to engage his passage in the steerage *Conditionally*,—and if he felt easy after reaching home would come again to the City in time for the sailing of the vessel. He went to bed as usual in Mount Holly,—and in the morning when his wife awaked, she missed him, and supposing he was making ready to depart went downstairs, but finding him gone she went into the road in search of him, and ascertained from one of the neighbours that he had seen him about daylight with a bundle under his arm going on foot towards Philadelphia. His wife never saw him afterwards, for he embarked on shipboard and ended his valuable life while on religious service in England.

John Woolman was peculiar and felt his mind often straitened in small things. He was not easy to go to meeting before or after the time, but believed that the hour should be observed. So he would go to the Meeting house, and wait till the time arrived before entering. He would sometimes sit on the horse Block till the hour appointed for Meeting.

My recollection of John Woolman is so distinct, it seems as though I could see him now before me. He was about my size—dressed in light clothes and a white hat. He was a man of few words and his public communications were generally short—but there was a savour attending his ministry and there was a peculiar melody in his voice. He was a peace maker in his neighbourhood and skilful in reconciling differences.