

**JOSEPH S. SEWELL:
A QUAKER
MEMOIR, PP. 12-132**

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Joseph S. Sewell: A Quaker Memoir, pp. 12-132 by Edith Sewell

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EDITH SEWELL

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Vol. 1, Page 11

Yours truly

J. S. Sewell

JOSEPH S. SEWELL.

A QUAKER MEMOIR.

COMPILED BY

EDITH SEWELL.

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13

PREFACE.

IN sending out this little book of loving memories my niece and I feel how difficult it is to do justice to J. S. Sewell's character; and the difficulty has been increased by the absence of letters and papers, and also by the fact that very few of his contemporaries are left, or are able to supply material about his early life. If we except the time of his residence in Madagascar, his was an uneventful life as regards his position in a public capacity. In his own family there was much of trial, from illness and suffering, which was always borne in calm, unquestioning submission to the will of God, and it is this trait in his character to which the writer has sought to draw attention. May it be a word in season to some of us who are at times weary and disheartened by the evil and sorrow around; encouraging us to do the little we can do, and to wait patiently for God to work in His own best time.

H. M. GRACE.

ready to believe, a shutting oneself off from all human interests, but was something which hallowed all business and social life, all family and national duties. Then also, he found a friend who recognised and loved the real, striving, earnest heart beneath the dogmatism and self-consciousness. By his engagement to Mary Ann Ellis he was drawn out of his own particular interests to a brighter and less self-centred life.

The third influence was one which we trust may never be wanting in the Society of Friends. The constant interest of the older members of the Meeting in the young men attending it, was only duly valued in the after years of his life. But it was the social ministry of such Friends as Robert and Rachel Jowett, and Benjamin Seebohm, which contributed greatly to the making of the useful and unselfish, wise and loving man.

When about nineteen years old, J. S. Sewell was troubled by doubts as to the correctness of Friends' views on several subjects. His aunt, Sarah Stickney, had, in 1837, married William Ellis, the well-known missionary, and it was probably his influence which unsettled J. S. Sewell. Sarah Stickney was already known as a writer on various subjects, and was greatly admired by her nephews and nieces. The close contact with missionary labour, the realistic pictures of the steadfastness under persecution of the native Christians, which Mr. Ellis portrayed, roused an unquenchable and lasting enthusiasm for missionary work on the part of Joseph Sewell. William Ellis appears to have been particularly drawn to his wife's

nephew, who on his part used to consult him on many religious subjects.

To an enthusiastic and ardent young man, Friends of that period appeared to be lacking in vitality, to be living on a past reputation rather than fitting themselves for usefulness in the present. Joseph Sewell was evangelical in his views, fearful that the Society had got into a groove of self-complacency, and so was somewhat inclined to believe that all religious efforts outside its borders must be good. So convinced was he that water baptism was essential to a Christian confession that he decided to leave the Friends; also he thought there might be more opening for missionary service if he was unfettered by Quaker trammels. At this time, when the door was closed to missionary work in Madagascar, he had some thought of working among the Jews in Syria.

He wrote lengthy, argumentative letters to his father concerning Baptism, quoting many texts which he thought bore on the subject. Abraham Sewell respected his son's convictions, and of all his children Joseph was the one most assured of a definite date of conversion, and, at that time, most reliant on his own judgment and opinion; but his father seriously remonstrated with him when he suggested resigning his membership in the Society, advising the delay of six months, besides entering very fully into the theological aspect of the subject. Robert Jowett also tried to help him, and his unfailing kindness, his efforts to understand Joseph Sewell's point of view and to give him wise counsel, though apparently fruitless

at the time, were, in later years, often referred to by J. S. Sewell, the memory making him in his turn more patient and sympathetic with the younger generation. The two following letters are of interest showing how he was led finally to abandon his position in favour of external ceremonies :

First Month 21st, 1840.

" MY DEAR FATHER,

"I am afraid thou wilt think I am long in writing to thee, but several motives have induced me to delay. I think I told thee that I had showed my manuscript on Water Baptism to Robert Jowett, and that we had a little conversation on the subject, which had, however, failed to convince me of the incorrectness of my views. Last month I came to the conclusion that if nothing prevented I would be baptised early next month, for I thought it was my duty to delay no longer. I do not, however, like to do it, nor did I think it right to do so without having first mentioned my intention to Robert Jowett and having some more conversation with him on the subject. As an opportunity for doing so never occurred, I thought it would be best to write a note to him expressing my intention and making a few remarks on the conversation we had previously held. This I did, and handed him the letter last First-day week. As soon as he read it he wished to talk to me, and last Sixth-day, being Monthly Meeting, I dined at his house. After dinner we had an interesting chat together for an hour and a half. He certainly did not convince me that my opinions