

Proceedings  
OF THE  
Wesley Historical Society

*Editor: REV. JOHN C. BOWMER, M.A., B.D.*

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**Volume XXXIV**

**March 1963**

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## THOMAS BIRCH FREEMAN, ANN GOULSTONE AND THE "FLY-SHEETS"

PRIMARY sources for the life of the pioneer West African missionary Thomas Birch Freeman include his *Journals*, published (1844) and unpublished, his unpublished *Reminiscences* (written 1860-1, revised 1884), and his official correspondence, now preserved in the archives of the Methodist Missionary Society.<sup>1</sup> These archives also possess a collection of exercise books containing about three thousand pages of manifold copies of letters written by Freeman between May 1848 and April 1857, with a gap between June 1849 and June 1850.

One of these letters is of interest, not only to the biographer of Freeman, but also to the historian of British Methodism, as showing the private reaction to the painful "Fly-sheets" controversy of an informed but personally uninvolved observer. It is addressed to Miss Ann Goulstone, of Bedminster, and was written from Cape Coast on 19th June 1849, more than eleven years after Freeman's first arrival on the Gold Coast, and nearly eight years after the death of his second wife, Lucinda, née Cowan. The background of the letter, both in Freeman's relationship with Miss Goulstone and in the wider setting of his dealings with the secretaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, may be briefly indicated.

On 25th November 1844, the fourth anniversary of his marriage to Lucinda, Freeman visited Bedminster in the course of his second furlough, which proved also to be his last. He wrote in his journal:

Saw my dearest Lucy's Bosom Friend Annie Goulstone. Oh what feelings did this interview awaken! Lord sustain me.

Freeman's account of further meetings with Miss Goulstone in January, April and May 1845 shows clearly that he intended her to become his wife. On 6th May he describes her as "my future companion thro' this vale of tears". He returned, unmarried, to the field in the following month.

By February 1847 arrangements for a third furlough were being discussed,<sup>2</sup> but Freeman's return to England was delayed, not only by the pressure of normal work, but by journeys with Governor Winniett to Dahomey, in March-April 1847, and to Kumasi, in September-October 1848. By that time a crisis had arisen in the financial affairs of the District. The Missionary Committee's anxiety about Freeman's rate of expenditure had led it to take the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Freeman's novel, *Missionary Enterprise no Fiction* (1871), which is based on his own experiences; and, for a voluminous account of his suspension and later dismissal as Chief Civil Commandant of the Eastern District of the Gold Coast, see Governor Andrews's despatches of 31st August 1860 and 9th October 1861, now at the Public Records Office.

<sup>2</sup> Allen to Secretaries and Allen to Beecham, 20th February 1847. (All references, unless otherwise specified, are to documents in the Archives of the Methodist Missionary Society.)

extreme step of declining to honour three of his bills, to a total value of £670. Freeman's resignation as Chairman of the Gold Coast District was accepted; it was arranged that he should wind up the accounts for 1848 and then return home, his place being taken by a senior colleague, William Allen.<sup>8</sup>

These arrangements were never put into effect, and Freeman remained in office for another eight years. On 24th January 1849 a public meeting of merchants was held at Cape Coast on Freeman's invitation, to examine the District accounts for the years 1845 to 1848. Its report confirmed that there was an accumulated debt of £2,250, but placed the onus of responsibility for it on the Missionary Committee in London, suggesting that it should have either provided an additional grant or else given "*positive* instructions" to reduce the number of stations. At the same time Freeman submitted a detailed plan for the remodelling of the District, which the Committee accepted with some modification.

By March 1849 he is able to write to Miss Goulstone<sup>4</sup> with characteristic optimism of the "improved aspect of this District"; but since Allen and another colleague are on furlough, Freeman himself must remain until the "end of this year". In June he writes:

I sometimes, now that the temporary excitement has passed away, wonder how it was that we allowed ourselves to be disturbed by the circumstance as much as we really were.

His remarks quoted below, later in the same letter, about English Methodism in general, and "our official Fathers" in particular, were not therefore written hastily at the height of the controversy, but several months after it had subsided.

The reason why Freeman's engagement to Miss Goulstone did not end in marriage remains uncertain. His letter of June 1849 shows that he was still expecting to see her "in a few months", and that he considered the engagement unbroken. In August, however, commenting in an official letter on his colleague Wharton's marriage to Miss Grant, a young woman of mixed descent, he writes from Cape Coast:

I have long urged upon the Brethren the vital importance of their making suitable marriages in this country if they desire to labor long in this District and give it the advantage of their experience . . . ,

and on 30th September he informs the Committee that

. . . it is my intention . . . to take the same step as Mr Wharton has done, and make this country my home.

It is through a letter from Charles Hillard to the Committee, dated 14th December 1849, that we learn that

. . . on Saturday [sic] the 8th Inst. Mr Freeman was married to Miss Morgan, who was one of our first members in this part of the world [i.e. Cape Coast] and who has been for the last three years a consistent and useful Class Leader.

<sup>8</sup> Secretaries to Allen, 2nd November 1848; Hoole to Allen, 22nd November 1848.

<sup>4</sup> 2nd March 1849 (manifold copy).

A search at Somerset House has failed to reveal evidence of Miss Goulstone's marriage about this time, or of her death. The problem of Freeman's sudden change of matrimonial intention has thus still to be solved.

His letter of 19th June 1849 contains the fullest expression of his reaction to the troubles which were disrupting Methodism at that time. The first few pages discuss his health, the recent financial difficulties, Wharton's engagement, and the work of the mission. After writing a paragraph of a more intimate nature, Freeman continues:

A word respecting the *Fly Sheets* to which you allude in your last; —I suppose it must be admitted that much that they contain is sober truth; but I cannot admire the spirit in which they seem to be written. I think that the Brethren connected with them ought, instead of taking their present Course, to try and act in a Body, privately upon the parties of whom they complain; and if such a plan should not succeed, make their complaints a Conference question, giving the adverse party due notice of their intentions. I cannot but apprehend, on the part of many of our official Fathers, from some unhappy cause, a serious declension of spirituality of mind. On this head, I am greatly grieved with circumstances which have passed under my own Notice. Listen—what can you think of the fact that for Two whole years no letter containing spiritual encouragement, advice and counsel was addressed from Centenary Hall to any part of this District?<sup>5</sup> I do not say this unkindly. I look upon it rather as resulting from the spiritually paralyzing effects of office unassociated with certain duties and circumstances which seem almost imperatively necessary to sustain, under such official requirements, the life of God in the soul. I know *this* from my own experience in my position in this country. The fact that I am the Pastor of the church in Cape Coast; that I have to preach, and have had to do so for many consecutive years—say, at least, Two Sermons a week, to the same congregation, the members of which are observant of my own growth in personal piety, from the “things new and old” which I have had to bring out of the Spiritual Treasury; and sundry other circumstances of this description, have always had a powerful bearing on the state of my heart, and constrained me to cling to the Cross of Christ.

My Dearest will consider these remarks referring to the *Fly Sheets* . . . as strictly private. I expect to hear of a very stormy Conference this year; but should this be the Case, I hope much good will result; and that our gracious God will over-rule all things for the well-being of the Connexion.

Another letter, written more than four years later to a former colleague, throws some light on the paradox of the last sentence quoted, and on Freeman's ecclesiology.

I cannot help thinking [Freeman writes, in a passage heavy with millennarian anticipations] that the recent agitation in our Hoine Circuits

<sup>5</sup> A striking echo of this sentence is found in a letter of John Milum, Freeman's successor and first biographer, to the Committee, dated 7th February 1881: “If reference be made to your letter-book you will . . . find that not a single letter of an encouraging nature has been sent to me from the Mission House since I left England.”

has been permitted in great mercy to lead all classes of our vast community to look to their "*Foundations*" and shake themselves loose from the world and from all earthly things . . .<sup>6</sup>

PAUL ELLINGWORTH.

<sup>6</sup> Freeman to Hart, 5th August 1853 (manifold copy). Freeman's assessment of the Oxford Movement, earlier in the same letter, is consistent with this: "I am quite prepared to see the rent of which you speak take place in the Established Church and the sooner it takes place the better. It needs a violent storm to clear and purify its heavily charged and oppressive atmosphere."

From the Secretary of the Society of Cirplanologists we have received the Lent 1963 Bulletin, together with the first supplement to the Register of Circuit Plans. The supplement is a lengthy one—"much larger than seemed likely last September", says the Secretary. This is partly due to the inclusion of the first instalment of plans deposited at the Archives and Research Centre in City Road.

The Bulletin is once again a document of considerable interest to students of Methodist history. The editor reports that Dr. Frank Baker has given details of a collection of plans for 1825 which is now at Drew University in the United States. This collection consists of a copy of a plan from every Wesleyan circuit (with very few missing) in England, Scotland and Wales. The editor of *Cirplan* says: "A similar collection for 1861 was noted in a footnote to the Register, but we have no details concerning it." We are happy to say that this 1861 collection is safely housed in the City Road Archives, and will be the subject of a report in a future issue of *Cirplan*.

The discovery of this 1861 collection led us at the Archives to ask every circuit in British Methodism to send us a copy of their plan for the first quarter of 1963, so that for future historians a complete set of 1963 plans can be set alongside those for 1861. At the time of writing, the response from circuits is by no means complete. Members of our Society would do us a service by ensuring that their own circuit is not defaulting in this matter. Do let us have a copy of *your* plan.

We would again commend *Cirplan* to all our members. The annual subscription to the Society of Cirplanologists is 2s. 6d., and should be sent to the treasurer, Mr. Arnold Whipp, at 29, Mather Avenue, Whitefield, Manchester.

In his *Catalogue of Wesleyana* (1921) the Rev. J. Alfred Sharp wrote: "The only known volume of sermons by the Rev. Alexander Kilham is in manuscript and is owned by Mr. T. P. Ridley (Gateshead), a descendant of Kilham." It is a pleasure to record that this precious volume has been presented to our Society and is now deposited in the Library. We would hereby express our thanks to Mr. Ridley for this historical treasure and assure him of our utmost care for it. The book is a thick volume of approximately 350 pages entirely covered with small writing—the arduous task of some historian to decipher!—and is a valuable Library accession.

Mr. Ridley's grandfather, the Rev. Thomas White Ridley, President of the Methodist New Connexion Conference in 1862, married a niece of Alexander Kilham. In addition to the manuscript volume, Mr. Ridley has also donated to us a fine engraving of Kilham and a rare edition of his *Life*. A bust of Kilham Mr. Ridley still retains in his own possession.