

Passage du quaker anglais Thomas Shillitoe en Suisse, en 1822

Thomas Shillitoe (1754-1836) a rejoint la Société des Amis quand il était un jeune homme. Il abandonne le travail dans une banque pour devenir cordonnier. Malade, il quitte Londres pour Tottenham. Il épouse Mary Pace en 1779, ils ont sept enfants. Engagé comme pasteur dès 1790, il voyage en particulier dans les îles britanniques, en Europe et en Amérique du Nord. Il rencontra plusieurs dirigeants des États européens.

Extraits de :

Journal Of The Life, Labours, And Travels Of Thomas Shillitoe In The Service Of The Gospel Of Jesus Christ, Volume 1, par Thomas Shillitoe, London, Harvey and Darton, 1839.

En 1821-1823, Thomas Shillitoe effectue un voyage en Europe. Le 23 octobre 1822, il quitte Francfort pour **Bâle**, où il est accueilli le 25 après deux jours et deux nuits de voyage par son ami Theophilus Bloomhardt et s'exprime devant diverses personnes (p.395-397). Le 30 octobre, il part pour **Berne** où il passe une nuit chez un médecin (p. 397-400).

Il arrive à **Genève** le jeudi 31 octobre et refuse dans un hôtel trois chambres avant d'accepter la quatrième, qui donne sur une rue principale. Il rencontre un pasteur « *who had separated himself from the established religion of the country, and who spoke my native tongue. Accompanied by a kind young man, a countryman, I walked about two miles out of Geneva, and called upon a person to whom I had a letter of address, and found him to be one with whom I could take sweet counsel: as matter arose in my mind I endeavoured to be faithful, although what I had to express was much in the line of the conversation, yet, under a humbling hope I was influenced by Divine requirings therein, it became like water poured upon the thirsty ground, having an increasingly solemnizing effect on his pious mind: he walked with us to the city, my mind continued to be vocally exercised as we walked along together, and at our parting he expressed in an agreeable manner the obligation he felt himself under to his friend in England, who had been instrumental in bringing us to be thus acquainted.* »

Il rencontre quelques personnes, dont des pasteurs : « *The evening I passed with a pious family, and two interesting young men, who were pastors; one of them put the following question to me, "Was it not possible that a sermon prepared before hand, if the person who prepared it and was to preach it, was sincere in his desires of doing good, praying earnestly to Almighty God to assist him when writing it, would be profitable to his hearers?" I replied, I durst not pronounce the impossibility of it; but as it was a subject I had at times thought much upon, it uniformly had closed thus with me, – that that which was offered in the way thus described, at best, could only be compared to hashed meat, or meat that has been warmed over again, which neither has the same savoury taste, nor does it appear to possess the same nourishing quality as it would have, had it been set before those who were to partake of it, when first prepared: after pausing a while he feelingly expressed his full assent to the truth of my reply, and I left our company under a comfortable belief that this evening's engagement will long be remembered by them.* » (p. 400-402).

Départ de Genève pour Lyon le mercredi 6 novembre 1822 « *I left Geneva under exercise of mind, on account of many of its fearless inhabitants; yet the belief that the time for my tarrying there was fully accomplished, afforded me a degree of peace.* » Il se rend ensuite à Nîmes, puis à Congénies avec Lewis Majolier.

Dans son *Journal*, il revient plus tard sur son passage à Genève : « *Previous to my leaving Geneva, the grievous abuse of the First-day of the week in that city took such hold of my mind, as to influence me to attempt an opportunity with those in authority; but not succeeding in obtaining*

a full relief to my own mind, the exercise reviving, accompanied with apprehensions of duty to take up my pen, I addressed the governors, magistrates, and clergy on the subject; and after submitting it to my English friends and Lewis Majolier, it was ordered to be translated into French: this subject being thus accomplished, my bodily health improved. » Le texte est corrigé, imprimé, puis transmis début janvier 1823. (p. 407, 413-418)

TO THE GOVERNORS MAGISTRATES AND CLERGY OF THE TOWN OF GENEVA

« In the course of a long journey of a religious nature, which I have recently performed through some parts of Norway, Germany, and other states on the Continent of Europe, afflicting have been the feelings produced on my mind on observing, in the different places where my lot has been cast, with how little respect and attention the First-day of the week (called Sunday) was regarded; how much this day, designed principally for religious edification and the service of God, was abused by all ranks and classes of the people, and occupied in business, amusement and dissipation. On reflecting, at times, on the way most likely to be effectual for the removal of the evils which this forgetfulness has evidently produced, I have been ready to say in my heart, "There is no hope;" but on my arrival at Basle, and observing the more becoming manner in which its inhabitants pass this day, all labour and business being suspended, and all dissipation and amusement entirely prohibited, these circumstances, together with the quiet and order that prevailed in the streets, exhibited a cheering proof of what a well-regulated police is capable of effecting towards the observance of this day in a manner more conformable to Divine command, which was, that one day in seven should be set apart for the service of God, and I am not able to discover, in any part of the Old or New Testament, that it has been annulled or made void. By this command, it was to be kept free from all unnecessary labour, business, and attention to lawful things, that so the mind as well as the body, may possess that state of repose and disentanglement from worldly cares, so essential to our experiencing the soul's becoming qualified to ascend in holy aspirations to its great Author and Benefactor, for forgiveness for our past conduct, which may not have been in full accordance with his pure mind and will; and to implore strength to withstand the future temptations, and encounter the future difficulties that may be permitted to assail our minds, amidst that hurry and bustle, more or less attending the business of this world. And surely if our duty requires our being thus liberated on this day from unnecessary care, even in lawful things, we cannot flatter ourselves that we shall be excused if we spend our time in sensual pleasure or gratification. From the example of Basle, I was encouraged in a hope, that as I advanced further into Switzerland, I should observe a gradual improvement in these respects; but, alas! my disappointment when in your city, and the painful feelings that were again excited in my mind, are more easily to be conceived than described, for on looking out of the window of my hotel on the morning of that day of the week, I beheld persons employed in carting household furniture and other commodities in and out of the city as a matter of course, numerous shoe-cleaners employed in your streets the greater part, if not the whole of the day, and the minds of the people appearing as much occupied about their outward concerns as at any other time. It is true that an appearance of decency is so far maintained, that the shutters of your shop-windows are pretty generally closed; but whilst the your shop windows pretty generally practices I have mentioned are suffered publicly in your streets, and remain uncontrolled, what good ground can there be for supposing that business within the walls of shops, warehouses, and counting-houses, is suspended in the manner that the duties of the day require. But even here, the evil practices to be found amongst you do not terminate, for the evening of this day of the week, which ought to be dedicated to the Lord, is occupied by diversions that appear likely to prove even more extensively fatal in their

consequences: your theatres, private and public balls, card-parties, &c. are open, and the persons who indulge in these amusements appear to consider themselves herein quite justified; justified either in consequence of the imperfection of your laws, or the weakness, the negligence, or the example of those whose duty it is to enforce them, and to warn the people of their danger. Oh, ye magistrates, and ye governors, whose duty I apprehend it to be to hold up and strengthen the hands of the magistrates in the discharge of their important trust, read in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, xiii. 4, where you will see that, according to the words of the apostle, you are to be found ministers of God for the encouragement of those that do well, and as his ministers for the punishment of those who do evil, by violating any of his divine commands, as it respects sabbath-breakers as well as house-breakers, for the same Divine Lawgiver, who declared, "Thou shalt not steal," declared also, "Thou shalt keep holy the sabbath-day;" and by one of the apostles we are expressly told, that "he that offends in one point, is guilty of all," (James, ii. 10); which I understand to mean, is equally a transgression in the sight of God; and in the truth of this declaration I am a firm believer.

« Remember, the magistrate must not be invested with power in vain; whatever difficulties a faithful discharge of his duty may involve him in, he must be willing to pass through evil report as well as good report, and not fear the censure, the ridicule, or the displeasure of high or low, rich or poor; for should any thing of this nature intimidate him, and prevent a faithful discharge of his trust, by not putting in force the laws against transgressors, it would have been better that he had never accepted the important station, or having accepted it, and finding insurmountable difficulties opposing the faithful discharge of his duty, to have then relinquished it: for in the great and awful day of inquisition, when every man's works will be tried and weighed in the just balance, it is my firm belief that those who have accepted posts of such great importance, in the execution of which the welfare of a state and the souls of its inhabitants are so much involved, and are not endeavouring faithfully to fill up their stations, will be found in a situation similar to the unprofitable servant whom we read of in the gospel, who had accepted his Lord's talent, and when called upon to render an account, had no excuse to make for his neglect of duty, but the difficulties attendant on faithfully occupying with it; it appears from our Lord's reply, that it would have been better for him not to have accepted it, for by so doing, he prevented its being occupied by another who might have acquitted himself with more fidelity. Make the application, bring the subject home to yourselves, my friends, and, where it is needful, suffer it to prove the means of stimulating to greater earnestness in the discharge of your important trust, or to a willingness no longer to stand in the way of those who may feel more true zeal for the honour of God, for his holy cause, and the welfare of their fellow citizens; for I believe it is utterly impossible for you or me fully to calculate the baneful consequences that these evening amusements produce, particularly on the minds of the unwary and inexperienced youth, their time on this day being so much at their own disposal, and being thus left at liberty to go where they please, can it be doubted that those who are in the habitual neglect of attending any place of worship, are strengthened in this neglect by the attendance of such amusements. And such being our natural proneness to seek satisfaction in the sensual gratifications (for I cannot consider them in any other point of view), is there not every reason to fear that the minds of such of the youth, in a particular manner, who are in the practice of attending a place of worship in the morning, and who spend the evening in this way, will be so occupied in anticipating the pleasure they then expect to receive at the theatre, dance, or card-party, as to render them unfit for the duties they are assembled to perform? Or admitting the contrary to be the case, and that some of them may be favoured to receive good impressions by assembling for the purpose of worship, is it not almost certain, that, if they spend the evening at any of the different places of amusement, these good impressions will become like the seed we read of in the parable, that fell by the high-

way side, which the fowls of the air devoured; is it not, I repeat, almost certain that the light, airy disposition of mind produced by these diversions, and the conversation of the company they fall into, will overpower the good they may have received, and leave them more poor and destitute than ever thereby becoming robbed and spoiled of the strength that had been mercifully imparted to them, and intended to have proved the means, in the Divine hand, of administering to their help, in combating their temptations and difficulties ?

« Let me, therefore, entreat you, oh! ye governors and magistrates, who have accepted the oversight of the conduct of your fellow-citizens, and oh! ye priests, ye professed ministers of the gospel of Christ, who on accepting your appointment, are declaring yourselves called upon to undertake the awfully important charge of the souls of the people, – let me entreat you, I say, to examine how far you are endeavouring, individually and collectively, faithfully to discharge the duties of the important trust you have respectively accepted, lest, in consequence of any neglect of duty in any respect, the language of the inspired prophet should be found applicable to any of you: “Oh! my people, they which lead thee, cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.” (Isaiah, iii. 12). Consider how far it has been your chief care to warn the unruly; and whether you have been, as is the duty of those entrusted with power, a terror to evil doers; for if a deficiency has been manifested in any of these respects, either by priests, magistrates, or governors, whether proceeding from a winking at wrong things in others, or by uniting with the people in these practices, it is my firm belief that a great load of the iniquity will rest on your shoulders, that much of the evil consequences resulting from them will lie at your doors. Think not, therefore, that you are excused from stepping forward, and doing your utmost towards providing a remedy for these things, by pleading they were introduced amongst you during the time your city was under the dominion of foreigners; but rather make a solemn pause, and take a retrospective view of what the Lord has done for you, and his remarkable interference in bringing about your enlargement, and breaking the yoke from off your neck. Examine how far it has been your daily care, to be found making suitable returns for the favours of the Almighty – this signal favour of Divine mercy; by exerting your utmost endeavours to remove from amongst you, all those evil practices, which they introduced, and left behind them. Otherwise, inasmuch as that God, with whom you, as well as I, have to do, declares himself to be a jealous God, jealous of his honour; and that those who dishonour him he will lightly esteem; is there not then reason for you to fear he may permit his overflowing scourges, yet more terrible in their effects, again to enter your borders; for I believe the Spirit of the Lord is grieved because of these things; and should such a visitation be permitted, while these evil practices exist, with what confidence can you look up to him, and implore that his judgments may again be stayed? Perhaps some of you may plead, by way of excuse, that different situations of governments alter cases, and that Basle, which I have believed it right for me to hold up as an example of what may be effected by the care of a well-regulated government, is in different and more favourable circumstances than Geneva. Supposing this to be the case, yet I dare not admit this as a sound principle to argue upon, that any local circumstances connected with a state, or any of its rulers, can justify the neglect of every exertion in their power, to effect a proper dedication of one day in seven to our religious duties, and thus giving testimony, in this day, to our dependence on a Supreme Being. Remember, delays are dangerous; and many have found, from sad experience, when it has been too late, that procrastination has been the thief of their time. Put not off, therefore, any longer an individual scrutiny; but let each inquire in the secret of his heart, Have I done my part towards applying a remedy for these evils? – and should a deficiency appear in any, let the time past suffice; and for the time to come, may such be willing, as well by good example as by persuasive precept, to use all diligence in attempting, by some means, gradually to arrest the progress of these pernicious practices; for I am fully persuaded, that by uniting

efforts herein, much may and will be done towards its accomplishment. Whilst I was in your city, I made several attempts towards a personal interview with some of you, but not seeing my way to continue longer amongst you, I was deprived of that privilege; and after my arrival here, this subject continuing still to press upon my mind, I believed the only way for my relief to be, my thus addressing you; accompanied with sincere desires, that it may be blessed to the encouragement of every one to step forward and do his part towards this desirable end. I remain, although unknown, your well wishing friend,

« Thomas Shillitoe, »

*« Of Hitchin, in Hertfordshire, England, but now at Congenies, Departement du Gard,
France. »*

En mars, il reçoit, avant son départ de Congénies, des lettres qui font état de la transmission de son texte aux autorités genevoises (p. 421).

« Geneva, March 11th, 1823.

« May God's blessing accompany you in every place, and rest upon everything you undertake for the advancement of his kingdom; and in particular, in your endeavour to excite in our magistrates and clergy a desire for the due observance of the Sabbath-day. I received your packet, and after conferring with M— V— on the most useful manner of distributing your address, I considered his proposal a desirable one; it was to carry your address himself to the council of state, to announce your intention, and deliver a copy to each of its members, to address one to each of the six auditors employed in the execution of the police laws of the city, and to send one to each of the mayors of the country districts, also to send to the pastors as many copies as there are members. This measure was partly put in execution yesterday, the remainder will be distributed amongst our friends: we have thought it best the address should reach the members of the government, previously to its being more publicly known. May the Lord conduct you to your country and family, and may your union with your friends, when your present pilgrimage is over, partake of an imperfect foretaste of your entrance into the heavenly country! Those of Geneva to whom you are known, retain a very pleasant remembrance of your short stay; and should they never see you again whilst inhabiting an earthly tabernacle, they hope to meet you at the foot of the throne of mercy. My departure from home deprives me of the pleasure of naming each of them in particular; but I can say they all continue united to you, as does he who commends himself to your Christian affection and your prayers, and who remains yours, sincerely attached,

« L. P. D. »

« Geneva, 17th March, 1823.

« I received the copies of the address to the magistrates and clergy of Geneva, which you had the kindness to send me, and immediately dispatched a part of them to the council of state, and others to the venerable company of pastors and magistrates engaged in the police department. Notwithstanding the excellency of your views, and the purity of your intentions, I can scarcely hope that your efforts will be crowned with a full and speedy success: we are in a state of convalescence, after a long and serious illness, and political bodies are more difficult to restore to a healthy state than human subjects; however, we have made some progress, and, with the help of the Almighty, we shall proceed still further. We retain a very

agreeable remembrance of your too short sojourn amongst us; we all love to indulge the hope of seeing you again in this world, and should rejoice in receiving an assurance of meeting you in a better state of existence. Do not forget Geneva in your prayers, nor the person who had the satisfaction of becoming acquainted with you in that city: accept the assurance of my respect.

« M— V— »

Michel Mégard, mai 2010