

Edinburgh, Scotland – Anti-Slavery & The Reform Mentality

Eliza Wigham (1820-1899)

Eliza Wigham penned the following letters. A missive from her brother John Wigham is printed at the close of this entry. The family was part of a loose association of anti-slavery Quakers functioning in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle and Dublin.

Eliza was an enthusiastic member of the Edinburgh Ladies Emancipation Society and the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage both of which claimed Elizabeth Pease Nichol, Priscilla Bright McLaren and Jane Smeal Wigham as leading members. Eliza's interests extended to temperance, suffrage and peace movements in the late 19thc. It is possible she penned The Anti-Slavery Cause in America and its Martyrs (1863)(Cambridge Library Collection). The book intends to dissuade the British Government from siding with the Confederacy during the American Civil War.

Eliza attended the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. Later, she openly opposed the British government's attempt, via the Contagious Diseases Acts, to contain prostitution.



Eliza Wigham

In the first letter to Wright, reproduced here, Eliza Wigham writes from Edinburgh and invites Wright to speak along with William Lloyd Garrison and George Thompson, a member of Parliament who had numerous contacts in the U.S. Unfortunately, the copy of the "Address to the Women of the U.S. of America," to which Wigham refers, was not included with this note in Wright's letter book.

5 Gray Street Edinb 11-10-46

My dear Friend,

I am requested to write to thee to ask thee to come & present thyself at the meeting at which we hope to have W.L. Garrison & G. [George] Thompson. I should have written to thee before now as the ladies of our committee were very anxious for me to do so. But I did not know when our meeting was likely to take place _ nor do I yet know exactly _ as they our friends have not written _ but thou art probably better acquainted with their plans than I, - & thou canst therefore tell us if thou canst come & then that thou hast not "decamped" as the "witness" asserted. _ If thou will write an immediate reply I shall be much obliged & of course we shall defray the necessary expenses of this gratification of our wishes._

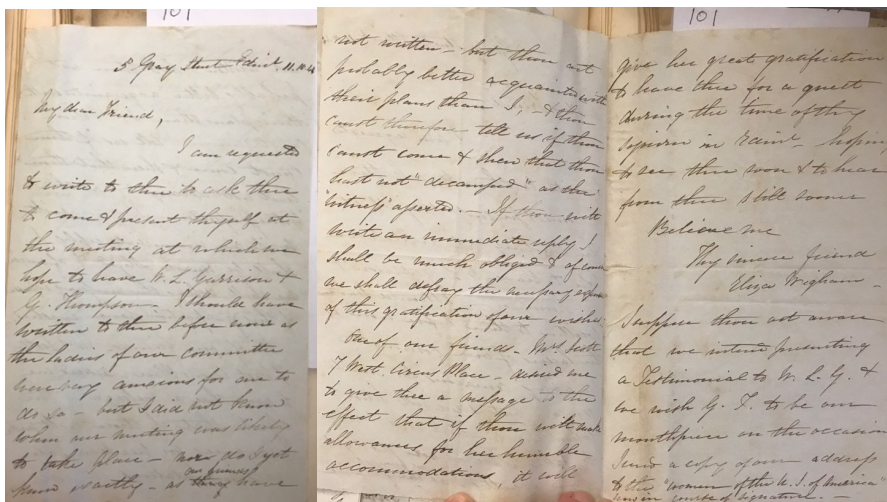
One of our friends _ Mrs. Scott 7 West Circus Place _ asked me to give thee a message to the effect that if thou wilt make allowances for her humble accommodations, it will give her great gratification to have thee for a guest during the time of thy sojourn in Edinb _ hoping to see thee soon & to hear from thee still sooner

Believe me

Thy sincere friend

Eliza Wigham _

Suppose thou art aware that we intend presenting a Testimonial to W.L.G. [William Lloyd Garrison] & we wish G. T. [George Thompson] to be our mouthpiece on the occasion. I send a copy of our address to the "Women of the U.S. of America" now in course of signature. -



In the letter below, Eliza Wigham refers to the "Dissolution of the Union," one of a multitude of political reform tracts authored by Wright.

Gray Street 11th Mo 12th. 46

My dear Friend,

Understanding by a note from F. [Frederick] Douglass that thou art in the neighborhood of Rochdale _ I wish to send thee a few lines, while I know where to address thee to ask if thou hast on hand any more of the "Dissolution of the Union" _ I do not know how it was but I never read it till a few days ago - & was deeply struck with its importance, as are all our ladies to whom I read it at a large good meeting we had today

The demand for copies was most clamourous & I had only one which I found in a large parcel left by dear Garrison (which contains the "Free Church & the accusers) these were worse than nothing to appease the claimants _ so I wished to ask thee if we could have any more _ I know we could get them _ The tract has a two-fold use, to show the iniquity of the Union & to show the fallacies of the "Liberty Party" - in pretending that the ballot box can abolish slavery _ & any information on these points is most valuable. _ Our meetings do not diminish in either numbers or interest and I think thou wilt have a more favorable opinion of the women of Edinb now _ since 10,320 were found to express their sympathy with the slave _ we are quite cheered with the success of this little effort so far _ I shall enclose thee a copy of our letter as perhaps thou might not have seen it _ Here I may thank thee very sincerely for thy kind note recd a few weeks ago & for the tract enclosed of which we have distributed a great many which were left by George Thompson.

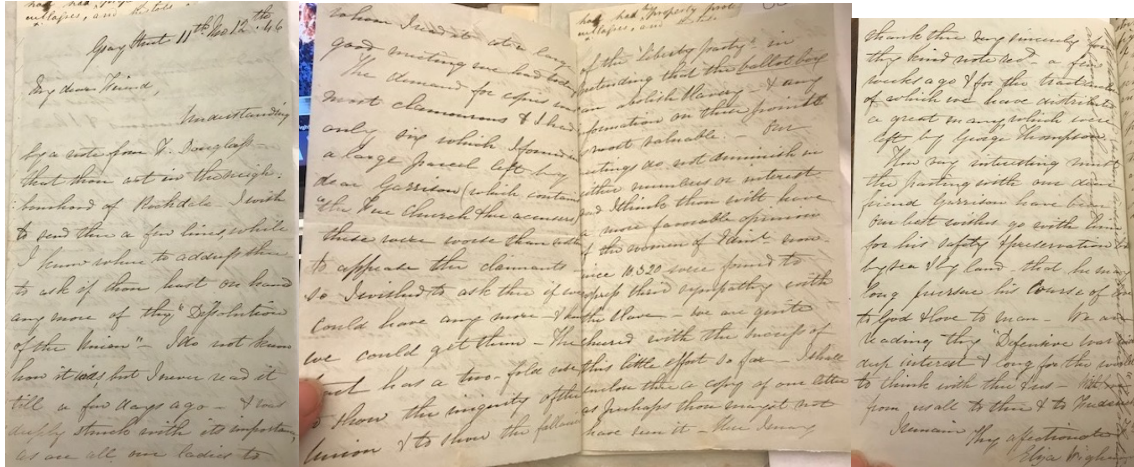
How very interesting [smult] the parting with our dear friend Garrison have been our best wishes go with him for his safety & preservation both by sea & by land _ that he may long pursue his course of love to God & love to man _ We are reading thy "Defensive War" with deep interest & long for the world to think with thee & us _ With love from us all to thee & to Frederick

I remain

Thy affectionate

Eliza Wigham

Will thee send me an answer about the "Dissolution" as soon as thou canst.



The following letter from Eliza Wigham shows she has doubts about accepting funds from American slaveholders. Darlington is in the north of England. In the missive she refers to Elizabeth Pease Nichols (E.N.) who became a close friend and associate of Henry Clarke Wright. Information about her follows.

Hutchand Darlington 4th Mo 3rd 1847

My [illegible] dear Friend,

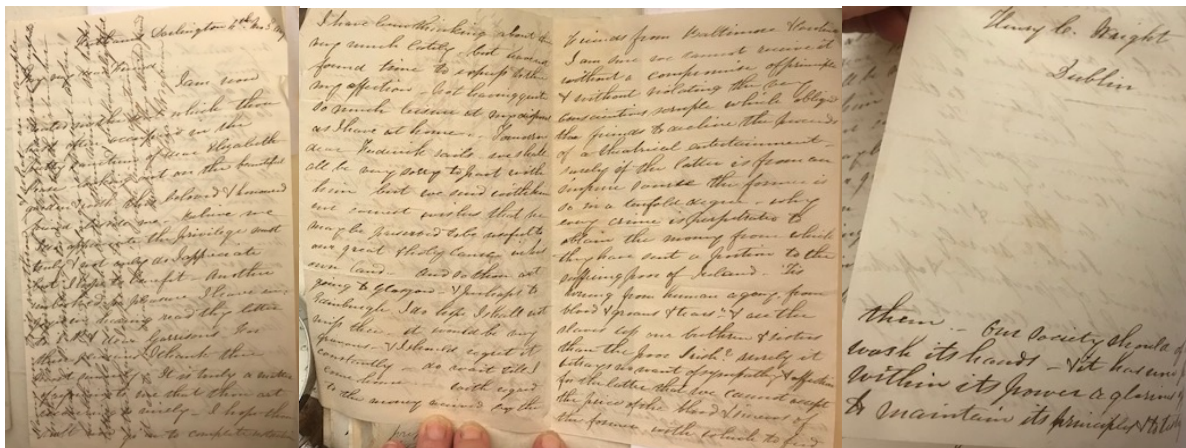
I am now seated in the seat which thou hast often occupied in the pretty sanctum of dear Elizabeth Pease _ looking out on the beautiful garden with this beloved and honoured friend beside me _ Believe me I do appreciate the privilege most truly I not only do I appreciate but I hope to benefit _ Another unlooked for pleasure I have enjoyed [in le caring] [reading] thy letter to E W & dear Garrisons _ For these pleasures I thank thee most sincerely It is truly a matter of rejoicing to see that thou art recovering so nicely _ I hope thou wilt now go on to complete restoration

I have been thinking about thee very much lately but have not found time to express to thee my affection _ not having quite as much leisure at my disposal as I have at home. Tomorrow dear Frederick sails. We will all be very sorry to part with him but we send with him our earnest wishes that he may be preserved to be useful to our great & holy cause in his own land. And so thou art going to Glasgow _ & perhaps to Edinburgh. I do hope I shall not miss thee _ it would be very grievous _ & I should regret it constantly _ do wait till I come home. - with regard to the money received by the friends from Baltimore and Carolina I am sure we cannot receive it without a compromise of principle & without violating the very conscientious scruple which obliged the friends to decline the proceeds of a theatrical entertainment _ surely if the

latter is from an impure source the former is so in a tenfold degree _ why every crime is perpetrated to obtain the money from which they have sent a portion to the suffering poor of Ireland _ 'Tis [ing] from human agony from blood & [grant] & tears"- & all thee slaves [?] our brethren & sisters than the poor Irish? Surely it betrays no want of sympathy & affection for the latter that we cannot accept the price of the blood & incest of the former with which to find them _ Our society should of all this wash its hands _ & it has now placed within its power a glorious opportunity to maintain its principles & to testify against slavery even to its overthrow _ & what an example for the Free church oh I trust it will not be neglected dear E. N. is visiting us & will tell thee about her [?] he {alili} _ so I said not enlarge at present _ as thee letter will be so much better than mine _ she looks better than I expected to see her & oh how delightful it is to be with her! __ with sincere affection

Believe me Thy attached friend

Eliza Wigham



Elizabeth Pease (1807 – 1897)

Elizabeth Pease and Henry Clarke Wright shared interest in reform on numerous fronts. She came from Quaker stock, part of a family known for philanthropy. Joseph Pease, the family patriarch, was a successful railway entrepreneur with considerable coal and manufacturing interests. He eventually played a visible role in politics and supported movements for peace. Elizabeth entertained more liberal views, even than family members. She saw Great Britain's fixed class structure as key to multiple social injustices. She developed sympathy for radical measures taken by the laboring classes.

Elizabeth advocated for the 1832 Reform Act. Under its auspices her father, Joseph, become the United Kingdom's first Quaker Member of Parliament. She went on to support a wealth of causes. She also attended the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention

in London. With Jane Smeal, she became active in the 'Moral Force Chartist' movement. (Chartists supported equal rights for the U.K.'s working classes. It took its name from a working document, the Peoples' Charter.) She and Eliza Wigham were two of a band of women who championed universal suffrage.

Pease eventually married outside the Quaker faith and moved to Edinburgh in 1853. Her husband, Dr. John Pringle Nichol, was a professor at the University of Glasgow. Relocating to Scotland brought her in immediate proximity to activists and friends in the Edinburgh Ladies Emancipation Society. Pease also joined the Peace Society and the Temperance Society, which promoted causes dear to Wright's heart..

A letter to her and to Wright, who was obviously in her company, follows. (It is conjectured that their relationship had a romantic aspect, but this is speculation based



Elizabeth Pease Nichol

on observers' references to their close association.)

Dear Friend

Elizabeth Pease

If HC Wright is disengaged tomorrow evening it would give us great pleasure to see thee and him to tea. I thought it better to address this note to thee as thou wouldst most likely know if he had any prior engagement.

About the same hour as we took tea yesterday wouldst suit us.

I am thy sincere friend

5th day noon

John F. Fatherspill

John Richardson Wigham (1809 – 1906)

A manufacturer, gas plant owner and inventor of gas illumination apparatus for lighthouses, John Wigham was a prominent abolitionist and a leader of the Edinburgh Emancipation Society. In the letter that follows Wigham reveals his distaste for the Scottish Free Church and its adherents taking money from American sources, most patently from slave-holding Americans. On the other hand, Wigham draws a distinction between the Free Church's and the Quaker Society of Friends' acquiring money from American donors, noting the latter had not solicited the funds it received. He also notes the Friends' money was intended for distribution to the poor and destitute, not for institutional maintenance, as the Free Church had done.

The Free Church was founded in 1843. A Dr. Thomas Chalmer, the founder, followed by his congregation, initiated the schism between it and the established Church of Scotland. The Free Church, which had as a primary tent support of the down-trodden, was denied public funds. Therefore, in 1845 a delegation from the Free Church travelled to the South of the U.S. to raise money. Many slave states were home to the American Presbyterian Church, a stepchild to the Church of Scotland, but an ally of the Free Church. As a result, the Scottish Free Church received gifts from American slave owners. The sum total came to about 3,000 pounds sterling. Prominent abolitionists in Scotland, England and Ireland demanded the Free Church return the donated funds to the churches in the South, as the contributions contained tainted slaveholding money.

Wright railed against the Free Church's acceptance of the gifts and, like Frederick Douglass, demanded the money be returned.

Because of his Quaker beliefs, he refused a knighthood twice.

Edin, 30th of Third mo: 1847

Dear Friend

Henry C. Wright

I am favored with thine of the 27th and am glad to learn that thy health is better.

With regard to the doings of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, I think we must leave them to themselves as Anti-Slavery men we are not answerable for their acts – Their position, appears to me, to be very different from that of the Free church _ They did not ask for the money – it was not sent for themselves – They were merely entrusted to give it to a portion of mankind, who are in a starving state _ the presumption is that, much of it is given by persons, who do not encourage Slavery, in any shape, but who probably abhor it, such I understand many be presumed

to be the State of Baltimore _ under these circumstances, would it have been wise to have occasioned delay by returning the money while the people are literally starving? I talked over the matter with Elihu Burritt last evening and, we both came to the conclusion that, under the circumstances, we should have voted with the majority. As it regards the theatre money _ there was little time lost in returning it _ there was no mixture of good source from whence it came ~~and in giving of it~~, and hence, I think they did well to send it back.

These being my views, I do not think that I can move in the matter.

I am very sincerely

John Wigham, Suy

