

Papers relating to Francis Hunt

Publication/Creation

1850 - 1851

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/c879e7kv>

License and attribution

You have permission to make copies of this work under a Creative Commons, Attribution, Non-commercial license.

Non-commercial use includes private study, academic research, teaching, and other activities that are not primarily intended for, or directed towards, commercial advantage or private monetary compensation. See the Legal Code for further information.

Image source should be attributed as specified in the full catalogue record. If no source is given the image should be attributed to Wellcome Collection.



Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

Memorandum handed to Jon: Baton. 11/25th 50

It seems desirable that the Superintendent should know that although it is not quite 2 years since unsoundness of mind assumed an alarming aspect in consequence of an overwhelming shock, yet for a considerable time previous, his conduct was in some respects strange & unsatisfactory, attended by great depression or elation of mind without adequate cause. After his release from the confinement in which he was placed at the time referred to, he spent some time in Jersey & then accompanied a family ^{of his acquaintance} to America, from whence he unadvisedly returned about 2 months ago. He has since been quite uncontrollable by his friends; & after his return to Bristol, his conduct, as had been anticipated, assumed a highly excited character — Great care will be required to prevent communication with persons in the neighbourhood: his acquaintance being rather extensive especially in connection with schools; & he has a strong tendency to make known his own views of his case, by writing & otherwise, whenever opportunity is allowed.

The case is not one which will require any particular personal indulgence; His friends would not incur needless expense; but at

the same time desire to meet his full cost
to the Institution - His having been so long
from under their care, must apologize for
the deficiency in his outfit.

L. H. is not a Member of our Society: ^{at} his
resignation was accepted by Bristol Mo. Meet^g
about 18 months ago -

11th mo 25th 1850

Bristol 28-1-1857

Dear Friend

John Vetching

According to the request
I will now give thee as much
information relative to the case of
J Hunt as I am in possession of

For a period of more than 20
years J H was a teacher in the
Friends S^d day school in Bristol, his
connection in this way with a number
of boys, induced him about 4 or 5 years
since to establish an evening school and
^{committee} also a day school, in premises purchased
and fitted up by friends; for some little
time he was the sole manager, but
friends soon found it would not do to let
him go on without some supervision, and
accordingly a committee was appointed for that

this J. H. never appeared to like and
~~the~~ cases occurred in which the committee were
obliged to act in a very peremptory way with
him in some things relative to the management
of the school, - about a year & half
since he was accused of gross misconduct
in connection with school which consisted
of a practice of handling many of the
boys about their privates, for what gratification
or what gratification this could be to
him we cannot tell, on being accused
of it he most solemnly denied the charge
in toto; the subject was then fully
investigated by the committee who had
the management of the school and I
am told by those friends that proof of
the most direct and complete kind was
produced by a considerable number of
witnesses, so that the committee felt no
doubt whatever of his having been guilty of
such practices for several years, - altho
the proof was so full & complete, he still
continued solemnly to deny it. The result
was that he was immediately dismissed from
all connection with the schools and has had

such an effect upon his mind that
it was soon thought necessary to remove
him to Thos Allis' near York where he
continued (I believe) about 6 months,
on his return to Bristol he sent to
the Monthly Meeting his resignation of
membership which was accepted, he
then went to America where he met
(as he says) with so many miraculous events,
I think he was away from England
about 10 months, on his return to Bristol
he set about convincing the children of the
schools and their parents that he had been
the subject of great persecution by Friends
that the accusations made against him
were all manufactured and that he
was entirely innocent of the crimes laid to
his charge, he continued calling meetings
of the parents & children in large numbers almost
every evening, giving them accounts of all the
wonders he had met with in America and the
miracles that had been wrought for his specific
preservation, stating also that those who had
been most active in getting up the evidence against
him had ever since been exceedingly unhappy
on account of the wrongs they had done him, and
much more of this sort calculated to excite the sympathies of those

he was addressing —
Previous to his going to America he had
always been supported by his Father, and also
for most of the time while there, but after
his return, I believe he never saw his
father but obtained support by begging
of his friends, finding he was going on
in this way and the excited state he
was in when talking to some of his friends
induced them to take the steps they did
in sending him to the Retreat; from
the time of his return from America to the
day that I went with him to York I knew
nothing of what he had been saying or doing
all that I have related has been since told
me. —

Application was made
to me by Sam Casper for assistance in
taking him to the Retreat as all JH's relatives
considered that was the most suitable
place for him and that the necessary
medical certificates had been obtained —
out of respect to his Father & the family
and believing JH would rather go with
me than with strangers had from the
Retreat on purpose to take him up
(which was talked of) I offered to accompany
him in company with one of my men who

very well known to F.H.; - while
Journ with F.H. at York he repeatedly
assured me that he was entirely innocent
of the crimes which were preferred against
him by the school committee that he
did not know of what he was to be accused
until the witnesses were brought against
him and that he had no opportunity of
replying to any thing that was said against
him, and further that some of the principal
witnesses against him were very sorry
now for what they had said on that occasion
and they were willing now to make statements
quite at variance with what they had formally
said. I told F.H. if that were true it was
a very serious state of things and that I
would make some inquiry respecting
it - on my return home, he gave me
the names of some of the parties who
were thus willing to deny their former evidence.

Since my return I have seen
some of the principal parties he then
named and find they still maintain
that the evidence they gave to the Committee
was true and that there was no truth
whatever in what F.H. had said respecting
their being sorry for it. I have also made

inquiry into the mode in which the
inquiry respecting him was conducted
and I am informed that every opportunity
was given him of proving his innocence
if he could have done it. —

many persons have considered him
not right in his mind for some years
for in the conducting the schools he took
the very highest possible ground and
considered he was divinely commissioned
for the purpose. he took the same
ground also for adopting the practice
long since banished from schools of
punishing boys by pulling off their
trousers, hoisting them on the backs of
other boys and then in presence of all the
rest of the boys laying the birch smartly
on the naked behind.

I believe the principal reason why his
friends considered him insane at the
present time was his entire want
of truthfulness and his moral perception
of right and wrong being so exceedingly
low. —

I don't know whether I have made
myself understood in all points,

or not but if thou wishes
any further information on any
point I shall be pleased to
give it thee

I remain with love
thy sincere friend
Saml Bowdler

J. Hunt

Bristol - Nov. 6. 1850.

Esteemed Friend

My request is so reasonable, that I cannot hesitate to comply with it, tho' the task is an arduous one, - more especially as I am personally concerned in poor F. H.'s history. His manner of speaking of me ^{to them} is only a continuation of what he has been accustomed to do for some time past. I think the best course I can take, for thy information & guidance, is to give thee a succinct, narrative of what has taken place within the range of my knowledge of him. I first became acquainted with him on my removal from Norwich to this City, abt 13 yrs ago: but for the first 7 or 8 yrs of this period our intercourse was very casual, & almost wholly of a public nature, - arising out of his connection with the large Irish Day School for Boys conducted by friends of this Meeting, ^{for proficiency &} (the high reputation of which were generally understood to be very much owing to his singular talents for influencing & ruling boys,) & ^{also} of his conducting a week day Eng

school for boys of the same class, chiefly by him-
self, (which also had a high reputation for good
order,) - both of which schools, I felt interested
in, & occasionally visited. In this occasional intercourse,
I found that he had a very large estimate of
his capacity for work of this kind, together with
the idea of being called from one high to devote
himself to it, in much wider & more important
fields than he had yet laboured in. I also
found, chiefly from the information of those who
laboured with him in the Fair Day School,
that he was of a self-willed, irascible, obstinate
make of mind, - & withal very impudent,
& loose in pecuniary matters. [It may be well
to say here, that his father, an active & able man
of business, never even placed him in the
way of learning, much less of carrying on any
kind of business; - doubtless from a conviction
of his unsuitableness for such pursuits: so that
from the time of his ceasing to be a mere boy,
he seems to have led a dissolute life, early mani-
festing his strong disposition to hold intercourse with

& exert an influence upon the minds of boys of the
lower class. His Father told me that, while he
lived ^{at} home, the manner in which boys of this
description were contending with & abusing him,
was quite offensive to the family. [When will
see the bearing of this presently.] ⁴⁰⁰ ~~Abt 5 yrs~~
ago, chiefly thru his means, the practice was begun
of bringing 100 or 120 boys of the Third Day School
to an evening meeting on that day: & the singular
group behaviour of these poor boys attracted a
~~great~~ ^{great} deal of attention, & was ascribed, with justice,
mainly to his extraordinary faculty of managing
them. His success in this matter evidently
added much to his previous ^{high} notoriety of his
gift & vocation in such ways: but, this result
was greatly augmented by the next step in his
history. Our Mother had now provided a
very spacious building for the Third Day School,
& F. H. Lord applied to us for liberty to use this
building, not only for his week day Evg School,
but, also for beginning a Midday & after school
in addition thereto, to be conducted by himself,

with the assistance of a Stipendiary helper. The
Moffat refused the application to a Comtee, & the
urgent feeling was rather adverse to the plan,
thinking he had already as much work on his
hands, as he was well equal to, & doubting his
getting so serious important points, we gave
way to his urgent representations, & seeing strong
sense of duty in the Moffat, - anticipating
nothing more than a school of abt 100 boys
as the result. As one of a Comtee ^{subsequently} appointed by
the Moffat to visit the school, & watch its
extraordinary growth & admirably order with great
interest, - gladly hoping that the great estimate
of J. H. was below his desert, & willing to believe
that he was really filling his proper place,
& one of great importance & usefulness.
When the No. of boys reached 300, I was con-
vinced that it had reached its utmost
maximum, & fully gave my opinion to himself
& the 2 young men friends who aided him in
the financial part of the management, but found

2) him wholly uncontradicted by any opinion
but his own. I therefore ceased to take much
interest in the school, except that I watched its
growth with wonder mounting to an only attendance
of nearly 500 boys! It was now an object of
great public attention, - the greatness & order of
this multitude being truly marvellous; & his
mind was with very much more exaltation than
before. Up to this point, I had stood rather high
in his favour: but, in consequence of the removal
from Bristol of one of his 2 Coadjutors in the fin-
-ancial & management of the school, (Mr. Spack-
tally at the Gloucester's Institute & now I believe
an Assistant of Mrs. Fard's,) a new form of man-
-agement was formed, & some of its members
made my writing with them a singular war.
I reluctantly assented, anticipating difficulty
& trouble, but hoping to do good. F. H. was now
 bent upon adding another large room, & 100 ²⁰⁰
more boys to the already unmanageable number.
This I & my 5 colleagues opposed & prevented; &
a very little effort satisfied us all that the present

members must be greatly reduced, say to 300;
but, nothing short of a positive determination, on our
part, to effect this reduction, could move T. H.
to agree to it. All this made him look upon
me very differently from before; but, things became
bad now trying when the Comtee gradually discovered
that the order of the School was ^{mainly} preserved by
a large & rapidly increasing use of corporal
punishment. T. H. being as self-willed & this as the
other Board, the Comtee sought the help of some
leading friends of the M^g, who lent their authority
to effect the much changes, greatly to T. H.'s dis-
content. I now come to the most important
part of my long narrative. A little before
the last-mentioned event, 2 of the younger
members of the Comtee informing me that, an
under teacher in the School had privately told
them that T. H. was in the practice of using
gross indecency towards the boys, when he took
them into a room, locking, for the purpose of
whipping them on the naked buttocks. For obvious
reasons, I requested these young men to learn the

mathe to my J^r. J^r. Eaton & myself. We first saw
the Teacher, who insisted on being Refrained; & then
had a long interview with F. H. who positively
denied the truth of the charge. On the whole, we
thought (whether the society, is doubtful) that the
best course was not to stir up feelings, by
instituting an examination of the children, & confronting
them with F. H., but to urge upon him the extreme
danger to himself of exposing himself to ^{on} ~~temptation~~ ^{scandal}
by privately punishing, as well as the high
objectionable char^r of the parent itself, - trusting
that, if he had done what was wrong, he would
if only from self-interest, avoid its repetition.
However, about two weeks after, the charge was renewed
from another & more ~~trust~~ ^{trust} worthy quarter;
& as F. H. still positively denied its truth, & chose
to abide an investigation, it was much ^{entirely} ~~entirely~~
fair or to children (some of 14 or 16 alleged witnesses)
were successively confronted with him, & gave
such evidence as left no doubt, & that was in
the mind of all the congregation that the practice
had been frequent. Mr. Eaton & myself were then

with F. H.
left alone, & anxious to stop the further progress
of so painful & filthy animosity, my eye upon him
to temper his guilt. This he at length did, tho' pre-
tending it had been once only. (I need hardly say
that the charge was one of indecent only, not
of what the law accounts crime.) We were offended
F. H. fashed of the issue, & having his authority
F. H. at once to resign his position in the several
Schools, & not to appear in them again. This he
at length assented to; & from that time (at a year
ago) I have never seen him; but, as I took
(unavoidably) the most prominent part in all
~~things~~ these things, (tho' with the cordial support
& concurrence of my 5 colleagues,) it cannot
be surprising that he should look upon me
as he does. — On leaving our last conference, F. H.
took to his bed; & it was soon reported that he
was "out of his mind". My younger colleagues, & others
of his acquaintance, who saw or heard of him
hereafter at this time, were convinced that
he merely ^{in order to cover his moral disgrace} simulated insanity; & I am disposed

3) to think that this judgment was in fact correct. Tho', considering the greatness & suddenness of his fall, & our fears of his credit & great authority, (in their particular line) to moral degradation & deprivation of all influence, & even ^{of all} occupation, I can easily believe that a measure so weak & every way ill-regulated might be really overwise. He was speedily removed to Tho: Allen's Establishment in York, & after remaining there some months, went to the United States. A few weeks ago I was surprised to hear from my younger ^{Committee,} colleagues in the school, that he had returned to Bristol, was holding ^{controversial} intercourse with the boys & junior teachers, which these young men thought likely to be very mischievous to the school, & was also manifesting a large degree of audacity, that fanatical spirit which has all along more or less shown itself. His father was now applying to; & the result was his removal to your establishment; tho' without my having taken any part or bearing

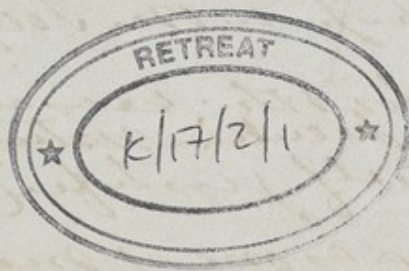
in the Step. - I have written this narrative
hastily, & with many interruptions; but I think
it will give thee some general notion of his history.
I do not pretend to much psychological
knowledge or experience; but I have a general notion
that cases now ordinarily his are not very
uncommon, ^{namely,} - such as present, low ~~mental~~
intellect & moral endowment, in unison with a
strong tendency to insanity. His understanding
has always seemed to me weak & his capacity
small. - He has manifestly a low & obtuse
moral sense, with a good deal of artifice: -
& there is a large infusion of fanaticism, in-
creasingly manifesting itself, & on which chiefly
I am told, the 2 Medl Men who signed the
Certificate rested their persuasion of his insanity.

If I could furnish any further information
that may guide thee in the treatment of this
case, I will readily do so - remaining

Respectfully Thine
Edw. M.

P.S. Perhaps I ought to explain what I mean
by using the word Fanatic, Let F. H. should
not at once show it. In past times, he
has said a great deal to Mr. Sater, myself,
& others abt extraordinary visitations & openings
which he has had, - pointing to corresponding
singular callings & destinies; & I am told
that, since his return from America, he
has descanted largely to young men & boys
of the town clasp, (reading from his Journal)
on the Extraordy or Miraculous persons
wh: he has espousd; & that he speaks of these
in Cornhill with some great purpose for
wh: he has been raising up, & preserving, -
as that of renovating our delinquent Socy.

At his Father's instance he resigned
his Membership in our Socy before he went
to America. for wh: reason our Monthly
Meeting felt itself justified in not drawing
his case forward as one of moral delinquency.



F. Hunt.

F. Hunt.