

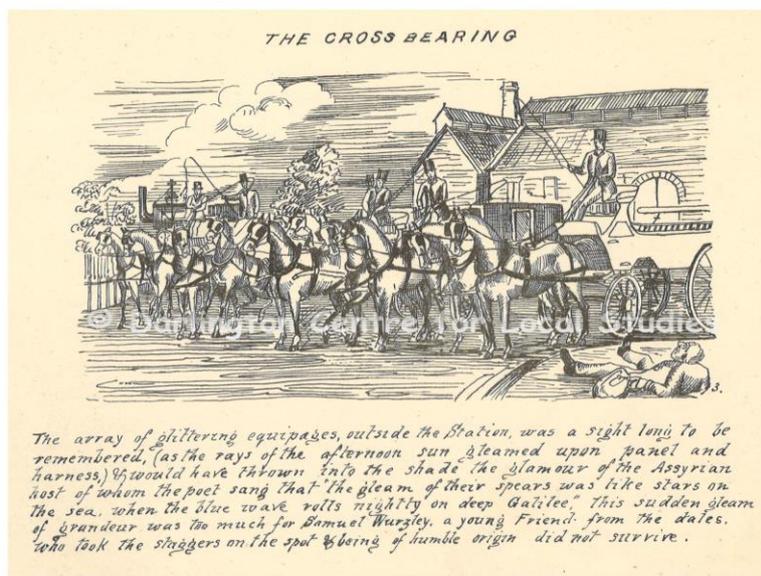
## The Friends in Council by Samuel Tuke Richardson, 1875



This charming book describes in words and pictures the week-long 'First Day (i.e. Sunday) School Conference held by Darlington Quakers in August 1870. At first glance, one wonders whether it could be a little like a Shakespeare Comedy – that is, that the jokes could take a lot of explaining... However, there is no need to fear, and no prior knowledge of Quakers is required to take pleasure in the wit of the text or its richly detailed cartoon-style illustrations.

First hints of the fun in store are to be found on the opening page, the programme of arrangements for the week in question. The Conference subject is described as: 'Our Society on its last legs and how to undermine the Established Church'. Gentle fun is poked throughout at the pretensions of all religious folk, the most merciless reserved for the Quakers themselves. Day 1 is reserved for arrivals and 'great loss of luggage'; Day 7 'will be devoted entirely to eating up scraps left by Friends'.

Two subjects are regularly the butt of the joke: the trappings of wealth, rank and privilege; and the overly strict application of codes of conduct within the organisation. There's a wonderful drawing of very smart horses and 'equipages' outside Darlington station: 'the gleam of grandeur' became 'too much for Samuel Wurzley', a young friend from the Dales, who took the staggers on the spot and being of humble origin did not survive'.



The Allocation Committee were constantly on the prowl for anyone 'of influential appearance'; but the Sessional Committee were even more fearsome – on their guard against Friends falling into the Vice of playing Billiards, or daring to attempt to evade evening Meeting by dropping into St

Cuthbert's...Best of all is 'The Ministerial Snore'. Lodged in one of the Bank attics, 'a snore of at least 8pig power' leads to a fracas during which, 'all peace principles were speedily forgotten' ('The Ministerial Crisis') and the Police ultimately arrive to restore order, assuming that a burglary must be under way.

The book ends with the depiction of the troubles of Friends returning to Ireland, many the worse for wear. It could have been the sea voyage itself – unusually rough – but unfortunately 'all agreed that Darlington must be unhealthy to produce such results'.