

## “The First Publishers of Truth.”<sup>1</sup>

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The latest Supplement to our JOURNAL shows again how much we should have missed but for this undertaking. It begins with the continuation of the terrible story of underground imprisonment at Norwich, where, for some months, Friends suffered every foulness of seventeenth century confinement, aggravated, in their case, by their refusal to rent rooms from the gaoler. As in so many other narratives, the story of Quaker persecution throws a revealing light upon the inefficiency of the government of the Restoration.

Many are the links that bind the generation of these earliest Friends to ourselves. The first Friend in Northamptonshire was Francis Ellington. It is but recently that Francis Ellington Wright died at Kettering. The names of Clothier and Batt occur at Street in the Somersetshire account, and Bax, Gurney, and Patching in other parts.

The account from Northumberland is brief, but that from Oxfordshire is long, and of vivid and painful interest. Friends made, in the Protector's days, a series of determined efforts to publish their message in Oxford; and the cruelty and ignominy to which they were subjected were remarkable even in that age, as one might expect in the haunt of lawless youth and established religion. Two young women were tied back to back by the students in S. John's College, and pumped on till they were nearly drowned. This followed on a night in the “Cage”—a place of ignominy—and a public whipping; and was followed by further violence, which caused lifelong injury to one of them.

These outrages occurred before William Simpson marched through the city naked, for a sign. Had it been after that strange event, we might have excused something of the violence of public opinion. It should be noted that

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this imitation of Isaiah had what we should now call the approval of the Meeting. William Simpson acquainted Friends with his mission thus to testify to the Puritan rulers that they should be shortly stripped of power, and "allso from yt Couering of Religion wth wch they seemed to be couered with." Friends waited on the Lord to know His mind and will therein, and then did the act in a solemn ritual manner, a Friend walking on each side of "the Sign" carrying his clothes. Some scandalised undergraduates would have laid hold on him, but were prevented by soldiers. The men of the Commonwealth army had read the twentieth of *Isaiah*. Indeed, William Simpson had been a soldier himself. We must not forget that this Friend, soon after his Oxford eccentricity, had a conspicuous part in the convincement of Isaac Penington, and that the writer of our account, presented to the Morning Meeting so late as 1705, was in full sympathy with him. Moreover, the pageant was succeeded by a large meeting and a powerful testimony from William Simpson. The age, rather than the individual, must take most of the responsibility for these weird doings. Solomon Eccles accompanied George Fox in his great invasion of America in 1671, and must therefore have been "in unity and good esteem," after he had given much the same kind of testimony, though not quite, on three separate occasions (see p. 240).

I dwell on this, not because it is sensational, but to point the moral that we ought to be slow in drawing parallels between that age and our own, not only in externals, but in drawing comparisons, often sadly unfavourable to ours, between their spiritual results and our own.

The clods of men's spirits had been broken up fine, so that seeds could find lodgment; they had been ploughed and harrowed by Reformation and Revolution, by persecution and controversy. Nearly everybody then would have claimed to have a religion; now-a-days, those who consciously have one are probably a minority of the nation. The smooth hard crust of habit and convention, of ways long established, and thoughts that are not of yesterday, make the success of the Quaker reformer more slow to-day. The Episcopal Church, when George Fox attacked it, was only a century old—and the Presbyterianism of England not much more ancient than the Salvation Army is now. Calvin, the great enemy, was only as far removed as John

Stuart Mill to-day. Independency was a mere contemporary. The religion of modern England was in the making just then, and the Quaker itinerants were agents in the process.

This issue includes Westmorland, the centre of the subject; for here was the cradle of Quakerism. We have a detailed account of the two epoch-making meetings, at Firbank Chapel Grayrigg, and at the chapel at Preston Patrick. Reading these quaint pages one can see Francis Howgill, on the latter occasion, fidgetting in the pulpit, rising only to sit down again, fingering his Bible, but unable to proceed, while George Fox, then twenty-eight, was sitting silent under weighty exercise at the back of the meeting. Here and hereabouts were convinced the young men whose names have appeared under the headings of Somersetshire, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, and elsewhere, as the First Publishers there. Here, in 1652, Quakerism first ceased to be the isolated faith of a few scattered believers, and became an affair of congregations. George Fox, indeed, seems to have captured several Separatist congregations, already gathered in a faith so near Quakerism that it was left to him only to crystallize the fluid elements ready prepared to fall into shape. In finding and reaching such prepared souls individually lies probably our best hope to-day.

The excellent editorial notes form the beginning of what may some day become a Quaker cyclopædia.

JOHN W. GRAHAM.

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Henry Macy liued [at] ffreshford, in Sommersetshire, travelled in Countyes of Summerset, Dorset & Wilts, a man of a very meek, lamb like spirit, was faithfull to y<sup>e</sup> last, layd down y<sup>e</sup> body at a friends house in Wilts, 1680.

JASPER BAT.<sup>1</sup>

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Tho. Shaw, a weaver, a Cheshire or Lancashire man, an honest, true man, travelled in England & Jreland, & sufferd much in those countrys, & laid down in Jreland his body, about y<sup>e</sup> time of y<sup>e</sup> Kings coming in, 1660. He travelld with Will<sup>m</sup> ffallowfield.

ROB. WARDELL.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> D. Portfolio 16.76.