

Words of Sympathy for New England Sufferers.

As an Appendix to Samuel Gorton's *Antidote Against the Common Plague of the World*, 4to, 1657, there are printed, in about thirty pages, some letters which passed between the author of the book and Friends in prison in Boston Gaol, New England, in 1656.

The history of the persecutions in New England is so full of the hatred felt by the representatives of Church and State for the Quaker preachers who reached their shores, that it is comforting to realise that amid all this opposition and ill feeling there were some in the various colonies who were drawn out in sympathy with the victims of the New England laws.

Samuel Gorton was one of these, and his letters give some insight into the depth of his sympathy. For he had himself felt the sharp edge of persecution both in New England and in the neighbouring colony of Rhode Island, and had been several times imprisoned for the expression of his religious views, since his immigration in 1636. Gorton was living at this time at Warwick, on Rhode Island, in which place, named by himself after his patron, the Earl of Warwick, he had considerable influence. He died in 1677.

The correspondence is prefaced by the following sentence :—

Certain Copies of Letters which passed betwixt the Penman of this Treatise, and certain men newly come out of Old England into New ;

Who when they were arrived at Boston in the Massachusetts-Bay, the Governour being informed they were such as are called Quakers, he sent officers to fetch them ashore, and being forthwith brought into examination what their business was into these parts, they answered, To spread the Gospel, and to do the workes of the Lord, whereupon they were all committed to prison both Men and Women, there to remaine till the return of the Ship, and then to be carried back into England, the Master being bound in 500l with others for security with

him to set them ashore in England againe, and that upon his own cost and charge, lest the purity of the Religion professed in the Churches of New England should be defiled with Errour.

The first letter is as follows :—

Warwick, Septemb. 16. 1656.

The Superscription.

To the Strangers and out-casts, with respect to carnall Israel, now in prison at Boston, for the name of Christ, these with trust present in Massachusets, New England.

Christian Friends.

The report of your demeanour, with some others of the same mind with you formerly put in possession of the place of your present aboad, as is reported to us, as also the errand you professe you come with into these parts, hath much taken my heart, so that I cannot withhold my hand from expressing its desires after you ; which present habitation of yours our selves have had a proof of, from like grounds and reasons that have possessed you thereof, unto which in some measure we still remain in point of banishment under pain of death, out of these parts ; a prohibition from that liberty, which no Christian ought to be infringed of : And though we have a larger room in bodily respects, than for present your selves have, yet we desire to see the prison doors open, before we attempt to go out, either by force or stealth, or by intreaty, which we doubt not but the bolts will fly back in the best season, both in regard of your selves and us : but we apprise more of the appearance of an evident hand of God exalting him self in his own way, than we do of our bodily livelyhood : for we fear not the face of man, for God hath showed us what all flesh is, otherwise we would visit you in the place where you remain, though we came unto you on our bare feet, or any that professteth the Lord Iesus, opposing his authority against all the powers of darknesse. If God have brought you into these parts, as instruments to open the excellencies of the Tabernacle wherever the Cloud causeth you to abide, no doubt but this your imprisonment shall be an effectual preface to your work, to bring the Gain-sayers to nought, which my soul waits for, not with respect to any particular mans person, but with respect unto that universall spirit of wickednesse gone out into the world to deceive and

tyrannise, and in that respect my soul saith, O Lord, I have waited for thy salvation . . .

I may not presume to use a word of exhortation unto you, being I had rather (as having more need) to be admonished by you, not doubting but you are plentifully enabled to admonish one another, let me make bold to say thus much to my self, *Stand still, and behold the salvation of the Lord.* We are Persons lie here as buried unto the Sons of men, in a corner of the Earth, grudged at that we have this present burying place : But our God may please to send some of his Saints unto us, to speak words which the dead hearing them shall live.

I may not trouble you further at this time, onely if we knew that you had a mind to stay in these parts after your enlargement (for we hear you are to be sent back for *England*) and what time the Ship would set Saile, or could have hope the Master would deliver you, we would endeavour to have a Vessell in readinesse when the Ship goeth out of Harbour, to take you in, and set you where you may enjoy your liberty.

I marvell what manner of God your Adversaries trust in, who is so fearfull of being infected with errour, or how they think they shall escape the wiles and power of the Devill, when the arm of flesh fails them, whereby they seek to defend them selves for the present ; sure they think their God will be grown to more power and care over them, in, and after death, or else they will be loath to passe through it ; but I leave them, and in Spirit cleave unto him (as being in you) who is ever the same all Sufficient,

In whom I am yours,

SAMUEL GORTON.

Then follows :—

A Copy of a Letter from the Men called *Quakers.*

The Superscription.

For our Friend, *Samuel Gorton*, this deliver.

Friend.

In that measure which we have received, which is eternall, we see thee, and behold thee, and have onenesse with thee . . .

Then follow many wearisome words which seem to have little point or meaning. Later the writers say :—

Now to that which thou writes to us, to know our minds to stay in these parts, we are unwilling to go out of these parts, if here we could be suffered to stay, but we are willing to mind the Lord, what way he will take for our staying, and if he in wisdome shall raise thee up, and others for that end, we shall be willing to accept of it ; but what the Master of the Ship will do in the thing we know not, they indeavouring to force him to enter into bond of 500*l* to set us ashoar in *England*, which he did at first refuse, for which they sent him to prison without Bail and Mainprize, as we are informed ; but since, he doth proffer his own bond ; but they will not at present accept it without security besides to be bound with him, for they are affraid that we should be set ashoar in these parts again, therefore they make their Bond as strong as they can, but the Lord knows a way to break their bonds asunder. The Master hath been writ unto and warned that he should not enter into bond, which if he did not, it would be as a Crown of honor upon his head, but if he doth, the Lord knows how to defeat them and him too : Now what he doth is out of a slavish fear, because he would not lie in prison, and hinder his voyage, but if the bond hinder him not, he would have been willing to have delivered us, and we should have been willing to have satisfied him, which we did proffer him ; and if he be not hindred, the Ship will be ready to set sayl about fourteen dayes hence, but at present the Master doth not know what to doe, their demands being so unjust, to force him to carry us, and they not to pay him for it, nor we shall not, and yet will not take his own bond, but will have security besides, so that he and they are troubled with a burthensome stone, the Ark of God doth afflict them ; send it away they would, but yet they are not agreed what to do with it ; so we shall leave thee to be guided by that wisdome, which governs all men and things, according to the counsell of his own vvill, and bringeth his purposes to passe by vvhom and in vvhom he pleaseth.

From the Servants and Messengers of the Lord vvhom he hath sent and brought by the arm of his power into these parts of the Word [*sic*], for vvch vve suffer bonds and close imprisonment, none suffered to speake or confer vvith us, nor scarce to see us, being locked up in the inward prison, as the Gaoler pretends, because vve do not deliver our Ink-horns, although he hath taken away three from us alreddy, and vvill not suffer us to burn our owne Candles,

but takes them away from us, because vve shall not vwrite in the night—though vve are strangers to thee, and others in this place, yet seen and known in the light, yet known in the world by these Names,

From the Common Gaol
in Boston, this 28 of the
seventh, 1656.

WILLIAM BREND,
THOMAS THURSTON,
CHRISTOP HOLDER,
JOHN COPELAND.

Post.—We and all the rest of friends wth us remember their love to thee, and if thou hast freedome let us heare from thee.

On the same page as that which contains the conclusion of this letter is written in a modern handwriting :—

Mary Price, Sarah Gibson, Mary Whitehead,¹ and Dorothy Waugh were imprisoned with the above-named.

Samuel Gorton's second letter is written from " Barwick [[?] Warwick] *in the* Nanhyganset-Bay *this present* Octob. 6, 1656."

To the Strangers, suffering imprisonment in Boston for the name of Christ ; these with trust present in Massachusetts.

Loving Friends.

We have thankfully received your late and loving Letters, but are informed that since the penning of them the Master of the Ship is ingaged with two of *Boston* bound with him, to set you ashoar in *England* ; so that we perceive God hath diverted our desired designe, we doubt not but for the best in a further discovery of that spirit so wickedly bent to hinder (if it were possible) the fruitfull progresse of the grace of the Gospell ; and it may be, the name² given unto you (we know not upon what ground) may come through an unalterable appointment, to be the naturall practice of such as so deal with you, when the terrours of the Almighty shall take hold of them.

Then follow some sixteen pages in which detailed references to the Friends' letter are made, and general approval is given to the religious views expressed. Gorton concludes :—

¹ Mary *Wetherhead*. ² *i.e.*, Quakers.

But I am affraid of being over tedious unto you, yet you may please to see my freedome again to salute you by the multiplication of my lines, and the rather because I perceive the ingagement for your return so speedily to *England*, and know not whether we shall ever come to speak mouth to mouth, or find a way and opportunity again to write: I hope it will not be burdensome to you to peruse this, no more than it would be to me to peruse a larger Epistle coming from your selves: And so with my hearty respects unto you all, I cease to trouble you further at this time,

Remaining yours, as you
are Christs,

SAMUELL GORTON.

In 1672, John Burnyeat and John Stubbs visited Rhode Island. The former tells us in his journal, "We had a Meeting at *Warwick*, where none had been before; and several were Convinced, and did own the Truth. And there we had to do with one *Gorton*, and his Company, who were by other People there called *Gortonians*, but they called themselves *Generalists*: They were of Opinion, *All should be saved*. But they were in reality *Ranters*: for in our Discourse they would maintain, and say, *No Creaturely Actions could be sin*; and would have no *Whoredom*, nor *Drunkenness*, nor the like to be *Sin*, but what was Spiritual; the Outward action was but creaturely. And thus in their filthy, unclean Spirits, they, like the old *Ranters*, made merry over the reproof of God's Spirit."

At a monthly meeting at ye house of W. Worfolkes, the 6th day of ye second Month, 1670, friends being mett there to consider of ye necessity of ye poore and of ye affairs of ye church . . . disbursed. . . . To Christopher Sheppherd for to buy hemp for E. Stevenson 2/4. And she is to shew to Christopher Shepherd how she bestows it, yt an account may be given to Christo Shepherd and Priscilla Camplin by hir how the hemp is wrought, whether she hath made deepings¹ yt are vendable, and account given of it to ye monthly meeting.

SCARBOROUGH M.M., *Yorkshire*.

¹ *Deepings* are the strips of twine-netting, that are laced together to form a drift-net.