

Review of Hancock's "Peculium."

"The Peculium: An endeavour to throw light on some of the causes of the Decline of the Society of Friends, especially in regard to its original claim of being the Peculiar People of God." By Thomas Hancock, sometime Lecturer of St. Nicholas Cole Abbey, E.C. Second Edition, revised, with an introduction by William Edward Collins, D.D., Bishop of Gibraltar. 1907.

The republication of this essay, after the lapse of nearly half a century, stirs some sad memories in the mind of an elderly reader. It was in the year 1858 that an anonymous donor, who lamented the decline in numbers of the Society of Friends, offered a prize of one hundred guineas for the best, and fifty guineas for the second best essay on the causes of that decline, the prizes to be awarded according to the judgment of Frederick Denison Maurice, Professor J. P. Nichol, of Glasgow, and the Rev. E. S. Price, a Congregational minister of Gravesend.¹ The first prize was awarded to John Stephenson Rowntree for an essay entitled, *Quakerism Past and Present*, and the second, which was generously made of equal value to the first, was given to Thomas Hancock for the essay entitled, *The Peculium*, which is being republished by the Church Historical Society.

Both writers were then young men, Hancock twenty-seven and Rowntree twenty-five: and both, having led pure and noble lives, and in very diverse ways served their own generation, have passed within the veil "to where beyond these voices there is peace." There is no need to institute invidious comparisons between their works, but I must be allowed to record my emphatic dissent from the Bishop of Gibraltar's judgment that "Hancock's is incomparably more powerful, and that it has a significance for the present day, whether it be regarded from a Quaker standpoint or not, that Mr. Rowntree's cannot claim to have." On the contrary, what chiefly strikes me in re-reading *The Peculium*, which I confess moved me to much admiration when it first appeared, is how little bearing it has on the present

¹ For references to this subject see THE JOURNAL; vols. ii. and iii.

condition of the Society of Friends, or on the seekings and strivings of earnest, religiously minded men at the present day. It is no fault of the writer that many of his arrows do not now hit the mark in a company of men which has been moving rapidly from the position which they occupied when he wrote. We are no longer, as a Society, so rich, so intellectual, so self-complacent, as we were then. For the great changes that have taken place, the essay of John S. Rowntree, Hancock's competitor, may almost be said to have given the signal: and with his deliberate wisdom and intimate knowledge of the conditions of the problem before us, he bore a large share in carrying those changes into effect. The consequence is that much of Hancock's discourse, eloquent and sometimes poetical as it is, seems now like the echo of a forgotten battle-cry.

Hancock's own life, as the Bishop tells us, did not run in the usual ministerial channels, though the result of his literary effort and of the friendship of F. D. Maurice, which it won for him, was his ordination as deacon and priest of the Church of England. A curate for twenty-three years, he was, from 1884 to his death in 1903, "Lecturer of St. Nicholas Cole Abbey, in the City of London, receiving no stipend during the greater part of the period, and spending more than he ever received from it in vindicating the Lecturer's right to an endowment of less than £20 a year, which had somehow become alienated from its proper purpose." Evidently this was a man with something of the true apostolic spirit, not one who "supposed that godliness was a gainful trade."

Of the book itself I have already hinted my opinion. I cannot see that much is gained by the author's constant harping on the word *Peculium*. That term of Roman law was used to denote the private property which a wife might hold independently of her husband, or a slave independently of his master. Neither the word nor the thought, as it seems to me, has any special fitness as applied to the early Friends' conception of their Church. The last thing which George Fox and his fellows aimed at was the formation of a little, select, and separate community. They considered that the Christian Church had been involved in "a great apostasy," that it was their

business to recall men's minds to the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, and by appealing to the Divine Witness in the heart of every man, to bring all men, even those whom the Prayer Book calls “Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics,” to a knowledge of the Truth. I do not see what this conception of their mission, (however sublimely impossible it may seem in the light of their actual accomplishment) has to do with the little savings of the Roman slave as defined in the Digest or the Code.

Mr. Hancock's position is throughout that of an uncompromising High Churchman. Archbishop Laud is for him a martyr, and the Parliamentary leaders, who (ungenerously and unwisely as most of us think) sent the poor old man to execution on Tower Hill, are “the Herods and Pilates of the time.” “The Catholic Church is alone not subject to decay. As surely as, by the Incarnation, the Blessed Word and Son of the Father took upon Him the nature of every man, so surely is man's soul Catholic by its very nature: so surely it thirsts after a Catholic food, which food, by one method or another, God is sure to supply.”

There is perhaps a sense in which we too could accept this statement, but, when uttered by a disciple of the Tractarian Churchmen, one knows whither it will eventually lead. But I would not dwell on our points of difference with this devout and earnest writer. I would rather close with one of those passages in which he shows a real insight into the inner meaning of primitive Quakerism and a sympathy with its spirit:—²

Their faith in the first truth, the Light Within, when they compared it with the dogmas and exercises through which they had endeavoured to get nearer to God, filled them with an awful and joyous sense of the Divine Presence. They had neither to rush to steeple-houses, to the popular preachers, to the Bible, nor to exercises, for their God. All the time they were striving and straining to reach Him, He was near to them: He, the Divine Word, was discerning all the thoughts and intents of their hearts: all their being lay open and manifest in His sight. So soon as they believed in His Light He not only showed them present duty, and filled them with present grace, but He threw rays backward on all the rugged and bloody passes of discipline by which He had been leading them: they saw He had been with them even in these hours in which they had felt most alone. Before George Fox “came to the Light,”

² First edition, p. 31; second edition, p. 53.

his biography contains passages which might be put into the "experiences" of a hyper-Calvinist, and would not seem out of place. There are all those alternations of bright and dark, of Christ's absence and Christ's presence, that April-day theory of Christian life, which seems to make the Presence of God dependent upon our consciousness of it, and in which, indeed, is shadowed forth the true and awful thought that the blessing of His Presence does depend upon our consciousness of it. But after George Fox is "enlightened," these doubts seem never to find one moment's place in his heart. He believes that Christ is always with him. When the Quakers felt it true that Christ their Teacher was with them, and not only teaching them, but also helping them to carry out their lesson, it must have flashed upon them with a new strength that He had done everything, had found everything; and they felt they could cry, "Not unto us, O Lord," with a fervour that no others could.

Their faith in the second truth, the universality of the Light Within, filled them with hope for the world. Those sects and churches might despair which believed God had rejected, by a fixed decree, great hosts of men and women. But they who believed that His own Son was then and ever knocking at the door of every heart and conscience in the universe, could not give up the worst sinner, the darkest heathen. There was hope for such as long as there was light, mercy, and power in Christ. It was the intensity of this faith to which they chiefly owed their wonderful success.

A noble passage surely, and one which makes us feel that, after all, our kindly critic and ourselves have been sitting at the feet of the same Teacher.

THOMAS HODGKIN.

At A monthly mens meeting at Horsham y^e 11th of 6th mo., 1680.¹

Present George ffox, W^m. Penn, W^m. Garton, Thos. Dockerell, Humph. Killingbeck, Rich. Steuens, Jo: Shaw, Rich Shaw, Jn^o Rowlands, Jn^o Barber, R. Snashold, Ed: Barber, Rich Gates.

The Buisnes of Rich Chasemore stands refferred to Jn^o Snashall and W^m. Garton, untill the next monthly meeting.

The next monthly meeting to be at Horsham.

¹ From the Minute Book of Horsham Monthly Meeting. We wonder how long the meeting lasted, and whether other business was deferred on account of the presence of G. F. and W. P. The visit of the former is briefly mentioned in his *Journal* (ii. 346).