

The Westmorland and Swaledale Seekers in 1651.

The Westmorland section of "*The First Publishers of Truth*" has made clear for the first time a vital fact in the history of Friends, namely, that in the early summer of 1652 a strong community of Westmorland separatists joined forces with George Fox.

F.P.T., p. 244, says :—

And it haveing then bene a Cōmon practise amongst ye sd seekeing and religiously Inclined people to Rase a Genrall Meeting at Preston Patrick Chapell once a month, upon the ffourth day of the weeke, to wch resorted the most zealous & religious people in sevrall places Adjacent, as from Sedbergh side in ye County of Yorke, Yelland & Kellet in the County of Lancaster, Kendall, Grayridge, Undrbarrow, Hutton, & in & about the said Preston Patricke, where ye sd ff : H :, J : A :, and sevrall others did vsuially preach to the Congregation there mett; and the sd Meeting being their Appointed that same day, thither G : ff : went, being Accompanied with J : A : & J : C. J : A : would have had G : ff. to have gone into ye place or pew Where vsuially he & the preachr did sitt, but he refused, & tooke A back Seat neare the doore, & J. C : satt downe by him, where he satt sillent waiteing upon God about halfe an hour, in wch time of silence ff H seemed uneasy, and pulled out his bible, & opened it, & stood up severall times, sitting downe againe and Closeing his Booke, A dread & ffeare being upon him yt he durst not begin to preach. After the said silence and waiteing, G : ff stood up in the mighty power of God, & in ye demonstration therof was his mouth opened to preach Christ Jesus, the Light of life, & the way to God, & Saviour of all that beleive & obay him, wch was delivred in that power and Authority that most of the Auditory, wch were sevrall hundereds, were Effectually reached to the heart, & Convinced of the truth that very day, for it was the day of Gods powr.

From this we learn that at the time of Fox's visit Francis Howgill and John Audland were their chief preachers; they met in General Meeting once a month at Preston Patrick, but came from a wide area which included Sedbergh, Hutton, Grayrigg, Kendal, Underbarrow, Preston Patrick, Yealand, and Kellet. It becomes evident that the wonderful series of meetings addressed by Fox during Whitsuntide, 1652, at Sedbergh (June 6th and 9th), Firbank Chapel (June 13th), Preston

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Patrick (June 16th), had all the closest connection with this community, who were "the people in white raiment" of the Pendle Hill vision, and were to supply the incipient Society with the accession of intellectual and spiritual force which made possible its rapid extension.

The early history of this community is a matter of extreme interest, and is closely linked with the name of Thomas Taylor, as the following extract from *F.P.T.*, p. 253, shows :—

He was bred up a Scholler att ye vnivrsety, & became a publike Minister or preacher, but, being a sencear & Conscientious man, denyed to receive his mainteance by yt antixtan & popish way of Tyths, so became minister to a people yt were seprated from ye Comon way of worshipe, then at Preston Chapell in Westmrland aforementioned, & tooke for his Mainteainance only wt his hearers was willing frely to give him, & was for his Cencerety & Godly liveing (according to wt was then made knowne) greatly beloved & esteemed by his Congregation wch were many, untill such time as there was Endeavers used by ye Presbeterians, Jndependants, & others for an Uriteing into one body or Church Comunion. And ye persons appointed for that worke did so far prevaile upon ye sd Thomas Taylor to goe back to sprinkle severall of his Children, yt he & his hearers had sene beyond and the emptyness thereof as an Invention of man & not ye one Babtisme of our Lord Jesus Christ, which Condescention his hearers could not beare ; soe he removed into Swodale [Swaledale] in Yorkshire, and became a teacher there to a Seperate Congregation, severall of wch was Convinced of Truth Soone after him.

Documents have now come to Devonshire House, among a batch of papers once belonging to Philip Swale, of Hartforth, near Richmond (Swaledale), which throw a flood of fresh light on the situation. The first is an epistle from an unnamed body of persons, addressed, "for our deare Christian ffreinds in and about Preston Patrick." The date, 21st February, 1650 (that is 1651, New Style), carries us back to the time when Fox was lying in prison at Derby and the Northern Counties had not yet heard his message. The *provenance* of the document supports the view which Norman Penney at once took, that it emanated from the separatist community in Swaledale, referred to in *F.P.T.*, p. 253, and, as will be seen, this view agrees well with the circumstances disclosed in the letter, and is made certain by the later documents of the series.

The letter is as follows :—

SWALEDALE PAPER, No. I.

Beloued breathren.

haueing Rec the sweete testimony of yo^r Christian Loue, signified in yo^r welcome Letter, we returne this as the meanes we haue at p^sent to declare o^r thankes vnto you ; and o^r Reioyceing in Christe wth you, for his Manifesta^on of Loue in the Spirrit of faith vnto you, and for yo^r Longing after the Jnlargement of the Kingdome of Christ in such measure, as thus far to extend in tendernes of Loue & Sweetnesse of Christian expres^on vnto vs : and that he hath giuen you to reioyce wth vs for those beginings and appearances of his Loue & Mercy to vs, and hath also made you soe far sensible of o^r wants, as to moue you in the power of his Loue, to Loue vs : & from thence so ffreely to condiscead to o^r desires for our Jnioym^t of o^r beloued brother, m^r Tayler, so far forth as an equall considera^on of both pts in the spirrit of Loue will admit, or more or lesse as the wise p^uidence of o^r god shall make vs all Judge expedient ; w^{ch} is as much as we can at p^sent desire of you : for in o^r form^r Lett^r, though we mentioned his settlem^t wth vs, and doe still desire the same, if o^r god se it fit, & make the same appeare soe to you ; Yet not that thereby we should sequester him from you, or wholly impropriate him to o^r selues, for then we should, in practice, haue condemned the p^uidence of god in makeing vs acquainted wth him, & giueing vs seu^rall times the Jnioym^t of him ; but that thereby, if god say amen to it, something of his goodnes might be by o^r deare freind, as an instrument in his hand, discovered to others ; as far remote from vs, as we are distant from you ; and that this place as the center might be the place of his Retirement, till such time as the Lord should call him to beare witness of his name elsewhere.

And also an other cause of desireing his Liueing wth vs is, the great Jncouragm^t & hopes we haue of geting a salary of 50^{li} p^ann, w^{ch} we caⁿot expect, except we could plead o^r haueing his family and so his settlem^t wth vs. And vnderstanding you are vpon endeu^{rs} for the like, we shall wate to se how god shall dispose of it : And if his p^uidence so order that he come not to settle as aforesayd, and that thereby we misse of the sayd salary, yet god inableing vs, we shall make vp 20^{li} p^ann for him

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at p̄sent, and as god shall hereafter inable or mooue any herein, shall be ading more.

We take notice that god seames to call to distance from you some of those that were a mouth in publique to you, by w^{ch} we also p̄ceue that a remna[nt] according to the good pleasure of his will is Remaining with you, & beleues the other either by word or lett^r will be remembering you, & that oute of that diuine fulnes some will be inabled to comfort the weake; But all we (and it is his mercy we are soe) are weake ones, & haue not any to administer a word of comfort to the weary soule, till the Lord make strong for himselfe in Christ some to p̄forme the same; besides the inward and outward oppositions still strongly p̄plexing & opposing, but stronger is he that is in vs then he that is in the world & he will not cease till he haue brought forth Judgmt vnto victory for vs all to the praise of his grace; to w^{ch} recom̄ending you all in Christ, we Rest,

Y^r very lo freinds & fellow Christians.

ffebuary the 21th, 1650.

[Endorsement.] For our deare Christian freinds in and about Preston Patrick this dd.

The carefully diplomatic wording of this charming epistle a little obscures the meaning. The main points may therefore be repeated. The writers thank the Preston Patrick community for agreeing to their desires, expressed in a former letter, to enjoy an equal share with Preston Patrick in the services of Mr. Taylor. They had hoped to have his residence with them, but admit that a share in his ministrations is all they can expect, though, if God say Amen to it, they still cherish the hope that he may come and settle with them. If this were to happen, they would not "wholely impropriate him," for that would be to condemn the way in which the providence of God had made them acquainted with him through his occasional absences from the Preston Patrick community. Indeed, they would expect him to have a wide service in places "as far remote from vs, as we are distant from you." Should he settle with them, they had good hopes of providing a salary of £50 a year,

the sum which they understand the Preston Patrick community is also trying to provide. As things are, they hope to make up at least £20 a year for him at present. Preston Patrick has some other ministry, they, on the other hand, "are weake ones & haue not any to administer a word of comfort to the weary soule."

In the next documents Richmond is expressly named. Thomas Taylor is now "Lecturer" there, and the writers desire to procure him a Parliamentary maintenance, and accordingly ask the godly ministers at York and others to certify as to his life and doctrine. The reference must surely be to the proposals made to the Long Parliament in February, 1652, by which Triers were to be appointed to admit to the office of preaching such persons, whether ordained or not, as could produce a testimonial of their piety and soundness in the faith, under the hands of six godly Christians, two at least being ministers. (See Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate*, vol. ii., pp. 98-105.) Other pre-occupations absorbed the energies of the moribund Long Parliament, and the scheme was never passed into Law, although it formed the basis of the arrangements established by the Protector's Ordinance of 20th March, 1654 (Gardiner, vol. iii. p. 21). The documents may therefore be dated in the spring or early summer of 1652, a date agreeing well with the "near 2 years" of No. 3, and the "neare Two years past" of No. 4.

SWALEDALE PAPER, NO. 2.

Beloued Srs.

it pleasing the Lord from the populusnes of this towne of Richmond and the great Ignorance and darknes we Liue in, Vnder o^r p^sent minister, to giue vs to eye o^r Necessities and to se the want of that mercie, w^{ch} other places haue from god in the inioym^t of those he Impowers for messengers of his truth, & being by the same puidence acquainted with and haueing had seuerall times wthin this 2 years the inioym^t of o^r beloued freind, m^r Tho. Tailer, of Preston Patrick, to speake in publique vnto vs, and through the powerfull working of o^r god there in, to giue vs to see this as a mercie, & to Loue & affect this his outward messenger, & to pswade o^r desires to desire

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his continuance wth vs to p^rforme the place of a Lecturer amongst vs.

And vnderstanding the Lord hath put into the harts of the plm^t to afford maintenance to godly ministers where such a competency is wanting, as it is wth vs, And that they may be satisfied that the same may not be bestowed on scandelus or vnderseueing men, Require that certificate be made of some honest, godly minesters of their Liues & doctrine, and haueing none wth vs or neare vs but such as either he is vnknowne to, or them who, if their Conuersations were knowne, as (wth sorrow) it is to vs, their Joyning wth vs herein would be a suffittient cause of deniall, or, appearing soe to vs, would dead o^r hopes, therefor we haue made o^r addresses to you, reading, in what we heare of you, that you are Led by in other power, & so hopeing that as feeleing Members you will be sensible of o^r Condition, & willing in yo^r places to further that w^{ch} may be for gaine vnto vs, therefore we desire, that if o^r attesting to you what sweete experience we haue had of the Lord power and Loue manifested in, & declared by this o^r deare freind, or if any of you haue had Knowledg of him or any other way satisfied in this truth concerning him, that you will please, if god so far in the power of his Loue for bestowing this Mercie vpon vs pswade you, to certifie in o^r behalves, what shall be made appeare Lawfull for you, to giue satisfaction of yo^r approueing of him or declaration of what satisfingly you may heare concerning him, the sayd m^r Tailer, to m^r Thomas Chalmer, who is Burges for o^r towne of Richmond, that we as well as others may haue a taste of the Parlm^{ts} Loue & care in the pcuring & inioying a salary for his maintenance.

thus com̄iting the issue hereof to the dispose of o^r god, and all of you to his Mercies in his criste, we rest.

SWALEDALE PAPER, No. 3.

S^{rs}.

being desireus to Jnioy m^r Tho Tayler, of Preston, for o^r Lecturer at Rich: he being an honest, religious, god'y Minister, & Knowne to vs for near 2 years, & haueing notice we cannot pcure a salary for his Maintenance wthoute a certificate from some godly minesters, and haueing none with vs but such as we suppose their

Certificate would not be approued on, we therefore hereby desire the godly Ministers at Yorke to signifie their good likeing of the sayd m^r Tayler, that thereby we may procure meanes for his Maintenance, & so we Remaine
Yo^r Lo freinds

SWALEDALE PAPER, NO. 4.

S^{rs}.

we whose names are here vnderwritten doe certifie vnder o^r hands that we haue Knowne m^r Thomas Tailer, of Preston patrick, neare Two years past, & that he is a pius, godly Minister, and one whome we are desireous to inioy for o^r Lecturer at Richmond, and haueing notice, that we cañot pcure a salary for his Maintenance wthoute a certificate from some godly ministers, And haueing none with vs but such as we suppose their Certificate would not be approued on, we therefor hereby desire the godly mⁿisters at Yorke to signifie their good likeing of the sayd m^r Tayler, that thereby we may pcure meanes for his maintenance, and so we take Leaue & Remane

.Yo^r Very Lo : freinds.¹

We are now able to piece together the history as follows :—Prior to February, 1651, the Preston Patrick community had a chief claim on Thomas Taylor's services. (The public debate at Kendal about Infant baptism, referred to in Robert Barrow's *Testimony to Thomas Taylor in Truth's Innocency and Simplicity shining through the Conversion . . . of Thomas Taylor*, 1697, belongs to this period.) In February, 1651, the Swaledale community, in return for their provision of £20 a year towards Taylor's salary, acquired a share in his ministrations. A distance of some forty-five miles separated Richmond from Preston Patrick, so that the visits were probably prolonged visits two or three times a year. Then, perhaps later in 1651, the difficulty caused by Taylor's resumption of infant-baptism occurred, and the Swaledale community was glad to secure his entire services. They

¹ Nos. 2, 3, and 4, are on one sheet, which is endorsed : " Lett^r to freinds at Preston." All the papers are in the handwriting of Philip Swale.

find a difficulty in providing his maintenance, and take advantage of the proposals that are under discussion by the Committee of the Long Parliament to try and procure a public maintenance for him, although there was already another national minister at Richmond. In the autumn of 1652 he came to George Fox at Swarthmore (see *Journal*, vol. i., p. 127, and George Fox's Testimony to Taylor in *Truth's Innocency*), and, being convinced, in a short time "left his benefice which he then had at Richmond, in Yorkshire" (Thomas Taylor's Testimony concerning his father, in *Truth's Innocency*), several of the Swaledale community being convinced soon after him (*F.P.T.*, p. 253).

No more conclusive proof could be given of the real continuity that existed between these Separatist communities and the Society of Friends which absorbed them than the preservation of the important documents that Norman Penney has now brought to light.

WM. CHAS. BRAITHWAITE.

The Northern Borders are a noted Instance of the good Effect that our Friends Labour of Love, had, among those Robbers call'd Moss Troopers that were there, so far to reform that Country (where they murdered as well as robbed) that the then Earle of Carlisle¹ told King Charles the Second, that the Quakers had done more to suppress them than all his Troups could do.

I have been informed that Friends have or had a Meeting in the midst of that Part of the Country.

William Penn told me of a Fellow, that, when he came to the Place of Execution, said, That nothing troubled him more than that he had robbed a Quaker.

There was a foot Pad once stop'd a Friend of Kensington, but when he found him to be a Quaker, he said he could not robb him, but said he was poor, and therefore begged something of him.

From *An Epistle to Friends*, etc., by John Bellers, 1724.

¹ See also *F.P.T.*, p. 63.