

## Extracts from State Papers relating to Friends.

### FIRST SERIES.<sup>1</sup>

It is scarcely permissible to hope that the Friends' Historical Society will ever be able to publish a Supplement which will equal or excel in interest "*The First Publishers of Truth*,"<sup>2</sup> but the work of collecting from the Domestic Series of State Papers those documents which relate to Friends was well worth doing, as it serves to bring together in a handy and convenient form, papers which can only be seen *in extenso* in the Rolls Office, or in abstract in the published Calendars, which are not to be found in every library. The Extracts which are now published have been transcribed by Charlotte Fell Smith, and relate to the period from 1654 to 1658. They deal chiefly with the sufferings of Friends at the hands of the County Justices and the occasional interferences of the Lord Protector and his Council in order to mitigate them.

Two of the documents contain reports by Friends as to the characters—for persecution—of the Justices of Northamptonshire and Dorsetshire, together with lists of names of other persons who were "moderate and against persecution," and fit to hold the office. Some of the Justices are said to be "cavaliers," but whether these exceeded in severity those who favoured the Parliamentary party is not stated, and cannot be deduced from the records: what is certain is that the majority of the county gentry, from whom the Justices were drawn, were Royalist in their sympathies and would be no favourers of sectaries, who were known to have sympathised with the opposition to the King, and to be opposed to the forms and ceremonies of the Church. In fact, it was the difficulties that Cromwell experienced from the constitution of the Bench that led him to make an interesting experiment in the creation of a military police, the Major-Generals, who are often mentioned in these pages. For

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the purposes of this scheme England and Wales were divided into twelve districts under the headship of these officers, who were at first designed to co-operate with the Justices, but in many cases practically superseded them. They were assisted in their task by a special force of mounted militia, and when we realize that this body was rather a police force than a military force, we are not so much surprised, as otherwise we might have been, that the Dorsetshire Friends should recommend two persons, one to command and the other to be a cornet in the local troop (p. 13).

The documents also show the numerous trumpery charges on which Friends were committed to prison, and kept there without trial from Sessions to Sessions, and from Assize to Assize. If a preaching Friend could not be brought within the conveniently wide definition of "a rogue and a vagabond," he could easily be taken before a Court and committed for the contempt of not doffing his hat, when a "mittimus" would be made out and he would be sent to the county gaol, where the severity of his confinement seems to have varied in a direct ratio with the hardness or the softness of his gaoler's heart. The reasoned and reasonable explanation of their conduct, which must frequently have been given by early Friends when they were haled before the Shallows of the time, and which is to be found in a very perfect form in the remarkable document printed on pp. 39-45 of the Supplement, had little effect on their judges, though one might almost have hoped that, in dealing with such a peaceable people, if the Justices were incapable of appreciating the reasons given, they might, at any rate, have found refuge—as the Council of State did—in supposing that their misconduct arose "rather from defects in their understanding than from malice in their wills" (p. 34).

Amongst other items of interest included in the Supplement are a transcript of the first reference to Friends to be found in the proceedings of the Council of State, which occurs on the 14th June, 1654, and two petitions relating to the case of the unfortunate James Nayler, while mention should also be made of the Introduction, which deals with the Record Office and its contents and has been supplied by Mr. R. A. Roberts, an Assistant Keeper.

*Preston.*

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