

Extracts from Presidential Address,

DEVONSHIRE HOUSE, 25 v. 1911.

In accordance with the request of our Editor I set down some points from the address which I gave at the Annual Meeting of the Friends' Historical Society. Inasmuch as I spoke from notes I cannot undertake to recall everything that I touched upon, or to express myself in writing as I did in speech.

In the historical study of our religious Society, beyond the satisfaction of our antiquarian instincts we have a practical end in view. It is well that we should realise with clearness that for which we stand, and be able to account for our existence separate from other Christian bodies and in so many ways different from them. At the present moment this is of special importance, when the thought of Christian "unity" is sometimes presented to us in such a way as to imply (if words are being used with precision) that, in the mission field and elsewhere, we are responsible for a breach of this unity and that our separate existence can hardly be justified. By historical study of the messages of the early Friends and of the circumstances in which they were placed, our understanding is enlightened and our loyalty is strengthened; we learn wisdom from the successes and mistakes of the past, and gain insight to direct our course. And as we come to see that Quakerism is the best form which *we* know of setting forth the Christian message, we do not say that we are "Christians first and Quakers afterwards," as if the one were some essential irreducible minimum which we must make sure of, and the other consisted of certain detachable spiritual luxuries stuck round the outside.

Our historical study is in one respect, at least, made easy by the care with which Friends have preserved their records almost from the beginning. William Penn, in the Preface which he wrote to the published edition of George Fox's *Journal*, touches upon this point; in the minutes of the "Men's Meeting" at Bristol we find frequent mention of the care which was taken to keep a record of births, marriages and burials. On pp. 120, 121 of vol. iv. of THE JOURNAL is set out a memorandum written by

Richard Snead of Bristol, explaining that when there was a fear that the minute book would be taken possession of by the Wilkinson and Story party "w^{ch} wee thus judged would not only be a wrongdoing in them, but also be a great Loss to us, on the Account of truths service," he (Richard Snead) had caused a duplicate to be written—"John Higgins he [?doen, *i.e.* doing] it, and I payd him, my self, for doeing thereof near Forty Shillings, in the yeare 1680." The meetings of the Scarborough and Whitby Monthly Meeting were held in the beginning at Staintondale, accessible from both places, and for some time a separate minute book (in triplicate) was kept for each of the three. The Quaker instinct for preserving records is seen in the story of Deborah Logan as told near the beginning of vol. ii. of THE JOURNAL.

Of late times our knowledge and appreciation of the early Friends has been greatly increased. The published histories were somewhat conventional; the second generation of Friends, ashamed of certain rough and uncouth passages and proceedings of the earliest days, quietly dropped them out of the books for whose appearance they were responsible. A schoolgirl is reported to have said that she thought all the ancients lived at the same time; the ancients did not all live at the same time, nor did all the "early Friends." It is not yet generally realized how different was the furious uprush, often turgid and ill-regulated, of the first ten or fifteen years from the subsequent period of organization and discipline and the scholarly presentment of the Quaker faith by Penn and Barclay. Much of our recently acquired knowledge will be made public in the forthcoming volume of the History of Friends up to the year 1660, written by William Charles Braithwaite in pursuance of a scheme planned by the late John Wilhelm Rowntree. There will also appear shortly a *complete* transcript of George Fox's *Journal*, published by the University of Cambridge, with editorial notes prepared by Norman Penney. One of the most important tasks on which our Historical Society has been engaged has been the printing of the reports concerning "The First Publishers of Truth." These are records written at the request of the Yearly Meeting, giving accounts of those who first preached the Quaker message in various places,

of the reception which they met, and of those who took them to their houses and accepted their message. Here for the first time we have understood the significance of George Fox's visit in 1652 to the "Seekers" at Preston Patrick in Westmorland, and of perhaps the greatest day in the history of Quakerism, when he entered their assembly and "tooke A back Seat neare the doore" and sat silent waiting on God for nearly half an hour. The preacher, Francis Howgill, "seemed uneasey, and pulled out his bible, & opened it, & stood up severall times, sitting downe againe and Closeing his Booke, A dread & ffeare being upon him y^t he durst not begin to preach."¹ Then Fox declared his message, and several hundreds were reached, many of whom became leaders in the Quaker Church. About these records, told very simply, there is often a wonderful charm. Concerning Pardshaw in Cumberland, we read, "Many more profound men & women were raised in this meeting, who suffered greatly the spoiling of their goods & Imprsonmt of their bodies, and were as the stakes of Sion yt Could not be moved."² Unwelcome truths are sorrowfully admitted—of Hythe we are told that "Friends grew as y^e Garden of y^e Lord. But in time, for want of Watchfullnesse, The Fowles of y^e Aire pickt vp the Seed in some, And the Thornes choaked it in some, And y^e sun scorched it in Others, so that that Scripture came to be fullfilled, Many called, Few chosen, to stand in y^e Battle, & beare y^e Burden of y^e heat of the Day."³

Of late years we have come to a better appreciation of the Quaker message as we have understood more of the historical situation in which it first arose. In fact, it is a considerable time since William Tallack published *The Friends and the Early Baptists*, and Robert Barclay (a descendant of the Apologist), *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*. This last-named work is not without its defects, but the undeserved neglect and disrepute into which it has fallen are, I suspect, due more to theological and doctrinal causes than to any offended

¹ *First Publishers of Truth*, p. 244. See "The Westmorland and Swaledale Seekers in 1651," by W. C. Braithwaite, *JOURNAL*, vol. v. p. 3.

² *Ibid.* p. 40.

³ *First Publishers of Truth*, p. 145.

critical sense. A study of *Gangraena*, written by Thomas Edwards, helps us to an understanding of the position taken up by Friends. Edwards ("shallow Edwards," as Milton calls him) was a bitter Presbyterian, and in 1646-7 he wrote the aforesaid work in three parts, reproaching the Parliament for being slack in their suppression of Independency and other sects. He declares that if the devil had his way, the toleration which the Parliament was allowing would be better for his purpose than a return to power of the Hierarchy of the Episcopal Church. He sets out long lists of what he calls "Errors, Heresies, and Blasphemies," and among these we come upon almost all of the points in which Friends differ from other Christians. They were not held by any one set of people, and, still less, as the outcome of any one central principle—it was as if George Fox had put a magnet into a mass of rubbish and drawn out what few bits of iron there were in it. For example, in this list of what the Presbyterian called "Errors, Heresies and Blasphemies" we come upon the following:—

PART I.

- p.* 28, *no.* 101.—That the Scriptures nowhere speak of Sacraments, name or thing.
- p.* 30, *no.* 117.—That all settled certain maintenance for ministers of the Gospel, especially that which is called tithes, is unlawful, Jewish, and anti-christian.
- p.* 30, *no.* 118.—That ministers of the Gospel in these days ought to work with their hands, and to follow some calling, that they may not be chargeable to the Church.
- p.* 30, *no.* 123.—No man hath more to do to preach the Gospel than another, but every man may preach the Gospel as well as any.
- p.* 30, *no.* 124.—That 'tis lawful for women to preach, and why should they not, having gifts as well as men? and some of them do actually preach, having great resort to them.
- p.* 33, *no.* 148.—That Christian magistrates have no power at all to meddle in matters of religion or things ecclesiastical, but in civil only concerning the bodies and goods of men.

p. 33, *no.* 149.—That for a people to wait upon man for a form to worship God by was idolatry; nay, for a people to wait upon Parliament for a form to worship God by was worse than corporal idolatry.

p. 34, *no.* 158.—'Tis unlawful for Christians to defend religion with the sword, or to fight when men come with the sword to take it away, religion will defend itself.

p. 34, *no.* 159.—'Tis unlawful for Christians to fight and take up arms for their laws and civil liberties.

p. 34, *no.* 160.—'Tis unlawful to fight at all, or to kill any man, yea, to kill any of the creatures for our use, as a chicken, or on any other occasion.

PART 2.

p. 1. *no.* 1.—That no opinion is so dangerous or heretical as that of compulsion in things of religion.

PART 3.

p. 4, *no.* 4.—That our common food, ordinary eating and drinking, is a sacrament of Christ's death, and a remembrance of His death till His coming again.

p. 6, *no.* 9.—That John's baptism, which was by water, did end at the coming of Christ, and that there is no baptism by water instituted by Christ.

p. 9, *no.* 14.—That 'tis unlawful to keep days of thanksgiving to give thanks to God for victories for one man's killing another.

p. 14, *no.* 40.—That 'tis not lawful for Christians to take an oath, no, not when they are called before authority and brought into Courts.

More important, however, than these are certain points which contain a measure of truth but in such a distorted and grotesque form as to have done much harm in our Society, even up to the present day. In the light of this knowledge we have a better understanding of certain controversies that have been carried on among us.

PART I.

p. 30, *no.* 127.—That men ought to preach and exercise their gifts without study and premeditation, and not to think of what they are to say till they speak, because it shall be given them in that hour, and the Spirit shall teach them.

p. 30, *no.* 128.—That there is no need of human learning, nor for reading authors for preachers, but all books and learning must go down, it comes from want of the Spirit that men write such great volumes and make such ado of learning.

p. 34, *no.* 157.—That parents are not to catechize their little children, nor to set them to read the Scripture, or to teach them to pray, but must let them alone for God to teach them.

PART 2.

p. 2, *no.* 12.—The means of God's revealing Himself and His mind and will to His servants in reference to their salvation is immediately by Himself, without Scripture, without ordinances, ministers, or any other means.

It is always interesting to look out the references to Quakers in the writings of the seventeenth century, and, in this way, to understand their position. One of the points which most laid them open to censure was their insistence on the fact that victory over sin was possible in this life, and they often speak of the " professors " as " pleading for sin and imperfection." The Puritan theology taught that victory would only lead to pride, as in the following passage from John Owen in his exposition of Psalm 130, " Were there not in our hearts a spiritually sensible principle of corruption, *and in our duties a discernible mixture of self*, it would be impossible that we should walk so humbly as is required of them who hold communion with God in a covenant of grace and pardoning mercy." Thus the Puritans insisted on the need for a small measure of sin, a sort of spiritual vaccination, in order to keep out the greater sin of pride, and to this the Quaker answered that Christ was not an imperfect Saviour, available up to a point, but that His power was sufficient to subdue the greatest sin. In the writings of Richard Baxter, who, as will be seen, was no friend of the Quakers, we get confirmation of their often repeated assertion that they, in the storm of persecution raised by the Conventicle Acts, stood more firm than did other Dissenters.

“ And here the fanatics called Quakers did greatly relieve the sober people for a time, for they were so resolute and gloried in their constancy and sufferings that they assembled openly (at the Bull and Mouth near Aldersgate) and were dragged away daily to the common gaol ; and yet desisted not, but the rest came the next day nevertheless, so that the gaol at Newgate was filled with them. Abundance of them died in prison, and yet they continued their assemblies still ! And the poor deluded souls would sometimes meet only to sit still in silence (when as they said the Spirit did not speak). . . . thus the Quakers so employed Sir R[ichard] B[rown] and the other searchers and persecutors that they had the less leisure to look after the meetings of soberer men, which was much to their present ease.

* * * *

“ Many turned Quaker, because the Quakers kept their meetings openly and went to prison for it cheerfully.”⁴

I have not time to point out further the ways in which study and research may help us in our spiritual work to-day. Our history is not yet written—no one has yet given an adequate biography of Margaret Fox—it is difficult not to call her Margaret Fell—to whom our Society owes far more than is generally understood : the story of Quaker education is not yet told⁵ ; the share of William Dewsbury in the formation of our discipline has not been recognised ; these are but instances of what there is yet to be done. In many a meeting there is good service to be performed by bringing out the old books from their hiding places and to the new-comers and to the young, and, in fact, to all, telling the story of the men and women whose names no one remembers, but who in their towns or districts gained for their religious Society an honourable name.

Scarborough.

A. NEAVE BRAYSHAW.

⁴ From Richard Baxter's Life, fol. ed., edited by Sylvester, 1696, Book i., part 2, §§ 431, 433, pp. 436, 437.

⁵ It is not generally known that even after the Toleration Act of 1689, at least twelve Friends were prosecuted for keeping school without a bishop's licence (see THE JOURNAL, iv. p. 131 ; v. p. 63). I have so far come upon only two cases before 1689.