

Notes on the Life of Edmond Waller.

It has been frequently asserted that, with one or two exceptions, the early converts to Quakerism were drawn from the ignorant and illiterate classes of England, but the ever-widening knowledge of the period in which Quakerism arose is revealing an increasing number of Friends of education and high social standing.

Among such may be mentioned Edmond Waller, son and heir of Edmond Waller the poet, of whom a few facts have been collected and are here given.

Edmond Waller the elder was born in 1606 and educated at Eton and Cambridge with a view to entering Parliament, and, by his own account, he was only sixteen years old when he first took his seat in the House of Commons. At his father's death he inherited an estate at Beaconsfield, in Buckinghamshire, and in 1631 he married Ann (d. 1634), only child and heiress of John Banks, a wealthy merchant of London. In Parliament Waller spoke with great courage against the dangers of a military despotism and worked hard in the cause of toleration for Dissenters, especially for the Quakers. Waller's second wife was Mary Bracey, whom he married in 1644, and who died in 1677. His death took place at Hall Barn, his Beaconsfield home, in 1687.

By his second marriage Waller had four sons— Benjamin, who was “wanting in common understanding,” was disinherited by his father, and sent to New Jersey; Edmond; William, a merchant in London; and Stephen, who became “an eminent Doctor of Laws.”

As a young man Edmond entered Parliament as Member for Agmondesham, and lived in the City. It may be that Friends, remembering the help given them by the poet, were wishful to keep in touch with his son, for Edmond seems to have come into contact with them from time to time, and finally to have commenced the attendance of their meetings for worship in the City.

It was in the year 1698 that Friends realised that this man of fashion, learning and high social position might become a convert to their simple faith. Henry Gouldney, writing from London, 5th of First Month, 1697/8, says :—

It has pleased the Lord to vissent a member of P—nt. viz. Esq^r Waller wth a concerne to inquier after truth, in the way of it: and within this weeke have been at severall meetings. He seems inclined to leave all the Glory and repputation he had, and that not a little, to imbrace that Dispised Principle and People that the Lord has discovered and gathered a remnant unto—Altho for some years, he have had a p^ticular love and care for us. I have heard, W. P.'s preface to G. ff's Journall hath conduced much to awaken him. I am in a concerne for his perseverance, being in hopes, he may lead the way to a further openness among p^{sons} of his ranck—a man of learning and great quallities of minde and of a good ffamily—I intend to go to his lodgings to morrow in order to conduct him to meetings, being yet a stranger. Through W.P.'s means, I have had him at my house, and am somewhat acquainted.¹

Six months later Henry Gouldney refers to Edmond Waller again :—

I have great hopes of the p^{son}, my early acquaintance, upon his first comeing to meetings, hath led me to a great ff^reddom wth him, having been divers times at his house in the Countrey. He has an indisposition so mallencholly, and of a weakly constitution, and I find good company mends both; and to do him good, I have used a modest freedom—He is under the conduct of Tho. Ellwood. They both love and value each other, and has great kindness for our ffrd W. P. whose epistle to G. ff's Journall was I thinck the 1st help he had to open him towards truth.²

It was in this year of 1698 that Waller finally joined Friends, and giving up his political life, retired to his estate at Beaconsfield. John Tomkins, writing to Sir John Rodes in Second Month, 1698, says :—

I understand by H. G. that he has also given the account of the convincment of a Person of note. He continues in the way of Truth he has begun to walk—he is now in Buckinghamshair at his own seate there,—he is comeing boldly to confess Truth before men by an open proffession therof in the cross to this world; is frequent at friends meetings there, as he was in the city, and constant with friends in Conversation. T. Elwood he has Respect to, who is helpfull to him.³

And in Ninth Month he writes, “Edmond Waller Continues in a hopeful way in the Truth, W.P. was to visit him as he came to London, so is the Baptist Preacher that thou hast formerly heard.”⁴

¹ *A Quaker Post-Bag*, edited by Mrs. Godfrey Locker Lampson, 1910, p. 66.

² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

In April, 1698, Waller wrote to Samuel Waldenfield from Hall Barn, a letter in which he described visits from London Friends, when "living fountaines of Heavenly Waters flow'd abundantly, and Gods love to man was made manifest by the Mouths of his people," adding later, "Washt in the Heavenly Euridanus [? Eridanus= the river Po], her golden streams will transforme and regenerate us to what man was before the fall, when God himself communed with him."⁵

Among Toft MSS. in D. is a copy (made by Thomas Smith, of Balby, in 1735) of a letter from Waller to Thomas Aldam, as follows:—

Hall Barn, Beaucons Feild, Bucks.
1698.

Dear Friend

Thy kind enquiry after my health obliges me to let thee know that since cousin Scroop left me I have been much troubled with a goutish or sciatick Pain in my right hip and knee which is very troublesome so that walking is uneasy to me and I have not been much abroad but at the time I go to meetings. I confess, as my body Impairs so my mind gains strength and Improves it self to a more steady settled submission to the will of God, in which sort of Resignation I find great comfort for he is the assur'd and only hope of Man when he Looks towards another world, and if all men desire to die in the peace of God and hope of a blessed future state surely we are not to be blam'd if we endeavour to Live in that Peace and that hope especialy when we have spent our Youth & Prime of our age in the service of our country and are arriv'd to what Horace calls *Donatus jam rude miles*, but I wou'd not make these things my only excuse for not attending the service of Parliament, but add That since it has pleas'd God to give me a sence of my former Evil ways and in an extraordinary manner to call upon me to remember my creator while the evil Days come not, nor the years draw nigh in which there is no Pleasure &c. I have with sincere and unfeign'd integrity, applyd my self to consider the Life and Teachings of our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles and as the Scriptures have been open'd to me in the reading of 'em I was convinc'd in some measure with John How in his Epistle to his Living Temple that their Religion was vain, which was not taken up and prosicuted with sincere aim to better their Spirits, to make them holy, peacefull, meek, humble, mercifull, and charitable, studious of doing good even to their Enemies composing our Body's into Temples, some way meet for the Residence of our Blessed Lord Christ Jesus, with design and Expectation to have his intimate vital Presence settled and made permanent there, and I may say with another there is a time when not only God is present with his children, for his secret Presence is continual'y

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69. A copy of this letter is under the care of Friends of Nottingham.

with 'em as is said Isaiah 43 but Christ also makes them sensibly perceive it by inward glorious feelings this felt Presence when we obtain it makes a suddain change of the whole Man, it raiseth us from Death to Life, it maketh a comfortable Light to shine where Darkness abounded, it maketh our Faith Lively, our Love fervent, and our Prayers earnest, this Presence is as evidently felt of them to whom it is granted as was the descending of the Holy Ghost perceiv'd, by the Apostles to whom it came; now having by the wonderfull mercy and grace of God sencibly perceivd this inward Presence of Christ, and remembering that Christ's Promise was, where two or three were gatherd together in his Name He wou'd hear them and be with Them, it led me to consider, who were the People that bare witness to this appearing and inward Teaching of Christ our Blessed Lord & Saviour, and finding none that so openly Profess'd and bore witness of this Holy Truth as the People call'd Quakers, I felt my spirit inwardly drawn to joyn with 'em as Christ's Flock, who acknowledge Him to be their Leader, their Great Sheppard, their Lord and Master and ownd no other Teacher. Now God having been graciously pleas'd to call me to the same testimony which He hath given Them to bear against the Corruptions and vain Customs of the World, I cannot act in any case where ought is required which is or may be contrary to that Testimony; in the Epistle to the Romans Chap: 8th this spiritual Life is open'd, the Apostle says we know not what to pray for as we ought, but the spirit it self makes Requests for us with sighs not to be express'd, the Fathers in several Places say, Prayers are not ours but the Intercession of Christs Spirit in us, pour'd out in his Name in whom the Father is ever well pleas'd, it is this Spirit by which we cry Abba Father, as in us the Spirit makes request for us, so with the Father Christ grants our request and forgives our sins, That which we pray for He gives who gives grace to pray. Having thus freely open'd my Mind to Thee Thou mayst be assur'd I esteem Thee as I sincerely am to Thee

A Faithfull and a Loving Friend,

EDM^D WALLER.

At Hall Barn, Waller received visits from many well-known friends, but of his life we know very little. It is unlikely that he married, as only one mention is made to such an event having been contemplated by him. John Tomkins writes, under date, 18. i. 1698/9,

As to E. W. and T. L's daughter. When he was first Convinced, he happened to fall into there hands, and there did appear too great forwardness in the old folks to promote their daughter; but quickly after, he went into Buckinghamsheire, I think it is now about 12 months, where he has remained ever since and is averse to any such thing.⁶

The interest felt in Edmond Waller at the time of his convincement seems to have been very widespread among Friends. Perhaps this is due to his social position. A

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161. T. L. may be Thomas Lower.

wealthy country squire and Member of Parliament, he had been brought up in an atmosphere of worldly gaiety far enough removed from the spirit of Quakerism to make his conversion a matter of surprise and interest. William Penn went several times to visit him in his country home, and it seems likely that two men brought up so much in the same atmosphere would feel to have something in common. Margaret Fox, unable herself to visit him, writes from London, 25. iv. 1698,

Dear Friend,—I should have been glad to have seen thee before I had returned to my outward Habitation, understanding that thou hast made Choice of that blessed Truth that we bear witness to. I cannot but say, It is well that thou hast chosen the better part, which, if thou abide in, and obey, it will never be taken from thee. I perceive by some Letters from thee, which I have heard read, that there is a Work of God begun in thy inward Man. . . .⁷

EVELYN ROBERTS.

Since the above was in type a valuable reference, as follows, has come to light in a letter from Thomas Lower to Margaret Fox, dated London, 27. xi. 1699, preserved in **D**. It makes evident that Waller's Quakerism was not of a very stable character.

As to my not mentioninge y^e death of Ed: Waller Jn my last J had not then hearde of it when J writt my last. Jtt is sayde y^t hee very much repented of his writeinge those renunciation letters off his proposalls as hee did : & y^t Jff hee euer liued to returne ffrom y^e Bath hee did Jntende to reuiue that Matter againe Jff hee might be receiued: & blamed y^m greatly y^t adviced him to y^e writeinge those letters : but hee is gone : out like y^e snuffe of a candle w^{ch} leaues an Jll savor behinde it : And they y^t Councelled him or were Jnstrumentall to Jnduce him to make shippewracke of faith & a good Conscience will haue litle Cause to rejoyce therein Jn y^e end.

The suggestion contained in note 6 is confirmed by the following extract from a letter by Mary Lower, wife of Thomas, dated iii. 1701:—"My daughter, Margery Robinson, I think is well settled, and hath a very honest good man [for her husband] and one that is very sharp in business ; I am well satisfied that she may have more true comfort in her station now than she might have had in a higher one. So that I believe it was in love to her that the other was disappointed." (Webb, *Fells*, 1865, p. 402).

⁷ Works of Margaret Fox, 1710, p. 532 ; Webb, *Fells*, 1865, pp. 396, 397.