

Women Writers among Friends of the Seventeenth Century and later

IN the Introduction to a *Catalogue of Tracts of the Civil War and Commonwealth Period relating to Wales and the Borders* (National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1911) occur the words :

“ Incidentally it may be mentioned that among the very few women contributors to the controversies of the Civil War period, not one had any connection with Wales.”

This statement suggested a search through Joseph Smith's *Catalogue of Friends' Books* in quest of Women Friends who might have written during that period. The result agrees with the above statement so far as women controversialists connected with Wales are concerned, and for the period of the Interregnum—a somewhat early one for Quaker writers—there are only about eighteen women whose writings can be classed as controversial.

In 1652, certain prisoners in York Castle issued a printed paper entitled *False Prophets and false Teachers described*, the women signatories being Elizabeth Hooton, Jane Holmes, and Mary Fisher ; in 1655, Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole caused to be printed an address *To the Priests and People of England*, and in the same year, Anne Audland and Martha Simmonds wrote controversial pamphlets ; but Margaret Fell was the principal Quaker woman writer of that, and perhaps of any, period. Her first piece is dated 1655, and twenty-four other separate works of various lengths are credited to her by Smith, down to 1677. In 1656, Anne Gargill wrote *A Brief Discovery of the Popish Religion*, and *A Warning to all the World* ; the following year Mary Howgill wrote an address to the Protector, and also to the town of Dover, and in 1657 also, Jane Bettris wrote *A Lamentation for the Deceived People of the World*. In 1658, Rebecca Travers and Sarah Blackborow appear,

and in 1659, Dorothy White, Grace Barwick, Ann Gould, Mary Webb, and Margaret Bradley.

Taking into review the whole of the Quaker period falling within the seventeenth century, that is, the last fifty years thereof, it is abundantly evident that women writers were not lacking among Friends, no less than eighty-four being mentioned by Joseph Smith. Testimonies to deceased Friends, Warnings, Lamentations and Prophecies, Invitations and Visitations of Love figure largely among the tracts of women writers.

The general opinion that the eighteenth century was a time of comparatively little aggression is confirmed by the fact that Joseph Smith catalogues only sixty-three women writers for the whole of that century as against eighty-four for the latter half of the seventeenth century, and over 250 for the nineteenth century. It must be borne in mind, however, that as time went on the subjects dealt with increased greatly in variety, and were not always either religious or controversial.

Next to Margaret Fell in the number of literary productions of the first half century must probably be placed Dorothy White, who has nineteen entries under her name ; then would come Rebecca Travers with ten, and Joan Whitrow with seven. The works of Margaret Fell were collected and published some years after her death, in 1710, but never reprinted, nor indeed was any separate tract of hers re-issued, save one which reappeared in a magazine a century after her works appeared. On the other hand, Elizabeth Bathurst's writings, first published in 1691, were reprinted six times down to 1788, and Elizabeth Stirredge's life was printed five times 1711 to 1838.

The most popular of the writings on Quaker subjects by women Friends, to judge by the number of editions, would appear to be Mary Brook's *Reasons for the Necessity of Silent Waiting*, of which at least twenty-three editions were printed between 1774 and 1870, in England, Ireland, Germany, and America, and which was translated into French and German. Sophia Hume's *Exhortation to the Inhabitants of South Carolina*, originally printed by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia in 1748, was

reprinted in Bristol, London, Leeds, and Dublin, in all six times within six years, and her later *Caution to such as observe Days*, was printed seven times down to 1766. Mary Mollineux's poems ran to six editions between 1702 and 1772, and of Priscilla Gurney's selection of hymns there were ten editions, the last bearing date 1848, thirty years after the first. Mary Elizabeth Beck's pamphlet on *What Does the Society of Friends Believe?* has been many times reprinted by the London Friends' Tract Association, since first issued. The same Association has issued, in nine years, 40,500 copies of Georgina K. Lewis's short sketches, *Elizabeth Fry*, and *George Fox*.

Of autobiographical records which have re-appeared periodically to the present may be noted Mary Penington's *Account of Exercises from Childhood*, written in 1680, printed in Philadelphia in 1797, 1848 and 1911, in London in 1799 and 1821, and in Rhode Island in 1874; Alice Hayes's *Relation of her Life*, 1723, reprinted five times to 1838; Elizabeth Ashbridge's *Life*, of which the first edition appeared in 1774, and six more later, published in Liverpool, Philadelphia, Dublin, Brighton and London, down to 1904.

NOTE.

The women authors in Smith's Catalogue of books *adverse* to Friends are five, *viz.*, in order of date of writing, Jane Turner, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, *Choice Experiences*, 1653; Eleanor James, of London, *A Word or Two Concerning a Quaker's Good Advice*, 1687; Grace Lamson and Mary Parke signed, with several men, *A Certificate . . . to obviate the false Reports given out by the Quakers*, in West Dearham, Norfolk, c. 1700; and Antonia Bourignon wrote *A Warning against the Quakers*, 1708.

Men substitute tradition for the living experience of the love of God. They talk and think as though walking with God was attained by walking in the footsteps of men who walked with God.

WILLIAM C. BRAITHWAITE, in *The Message and Mission of Quakerism*, Phila. ed., p. 28.