

Benjamin Furly, Quaker Merchant, and his Statesmen Friends

BENJAMIN FURLY was one of the wealthy people who allied themselves with Quakerism in its early days. He was born at Colchester in Essex, in the year 1636, and began business life as a merchant there.¹

In 1659-60 he assisted John Stubbs and George Fox in the compilation of *A Battle-Door for Teachers and Professors to learn Singular and Plural, You to Many, and Thou to One*, a work of fifty-seven folio sheets, printed in thirty languages, the Chaldee, Syriac, Welsh, and French Battle-Doors being written by him. He possessed a very large and curious collection of books, which were sold by auction at Rotterdam in 1714, and realised £7,638 19s. The catalogue, entitled *Bibliotheca Furliana*, consisting of 400 pages, and dealing with over 4,400 volumes, was bought in, and afterwards sold by his second son to Archbishop Secker for the British Museum. This is interleaved with MS. notes, giving price and buyer of each lot.

Some time previous to 1660, Furly went to reside in Amsterdam, afterwards making Rotterdam his home, where he set up as a merchant, in the Scheepmakers Haven. In 1677 George Fox stayed there and held religious meetings at Furly's home in Rotterdam, and then Furly accompanied Fox, Keith and others through a greater part of Holland and Germany, acting as an interpreter. Later on in the same year he made a ministerial journey with William Penn. His house became the rendezvous of Le Clerc, Limborch, and other learned men, and there he entertained Algernon Sidney, John

¹ For fuller information, see "The Furley Family of Essex," by Gibbins, in *The Essex Review*, 1899; C. Fell Smith's *Steven Crisp*; *D.N.B.*; etc. Furly died in 1715/16, if the extract from the registers of St. Nicholas Parish, Colchester, refer to him:—"Benjamin Furley, buried among y^e Quakers, 9 March, 1715/16." (J. J. GREEN.)

Locke (1686-8), and Locke's pupil, the third Lord Shaftesbury, 1698-9.

Algernon Sidney constantly wrote to him during the years 1677 to 1679. Edward Clark, of Chipley, seems to have introduced Locke to him, and their correspondence lasted as long as Locke lived. Letters which passed between Furly and Locke, Sidney and Shaftesbury were printed in 1830 (for private circulation), by Thomas Ignatius Maria Forster, M.B., a descendant of Furly, and the owner of the manuscripts.²

The first letter written by Locke, dated the 26th December, 1686, is in a humorous vein, and deals with Furly's treatment of some of the Baptist writers of the period. He tells him not to expect to subdue his opponents with "a paper potgun."

The madness wherewith you expect to work such a miracle deserves a dipping and no doubt the Colonel [the Baptist protagonist] who is expert at it would do you this kindness. But whether when he had you under water he would not clap his hand on your head, and according to the method of his brother doctor of Scotland keep you there till he was perfectly assured of your being tamed, I leave you to consider.

And again :

You wish me with you, and desire I should make haste and so do I too, but I doubt whether you would be of the same mind if you knew one of my reasons. A cask of mum, an hogshead of cider, and, without doubt, even now and then a bottle of wine, or a zopie among, for a more effective remedy against phlegmatic humours and rainy weather ; this I suspect in my absence will make brave work, and heresie will arise in the "Lanterne"³ when so watered, and the mischief is, I cannot

² Dr. Forster writes in his Preface :

"The letters of Locke, of Algernon Sidney, and of the Earl of Shaftesbury published in this volume, addressed to Mr. Furly of Rotterdam, came by the death of that gentleman into the possession of my grandfather, Mr. Edward Forster, of Walthamstow, Essex, among other very curious manuscripts. At his death, which took place on the 20th of April, 1812, they became the property of my father, Mr. Thos. Furly Forster, of Clapton, at whose death, in October, 1825, they came into my hands, and were made my property by an act of his will dated April, 1824, together with a large collection of the MS. correspondence of some celebrated writers who flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries."

³ Dr. Forster thinks that this is a meeting of Quakers. More probably it was a group of literary men who met to discuss philosophy and other subjects.

On 26 December, 1686, Locke asks to be "remembered to all the assembly at the Lanterne." Also, 20 February, 1687, "Give my love and respect to the company in the Lanterne," and again, 19 January, 1688, he refers to some "Lanterne reasons."

find anyone to make my deputy over-seer. Our old master and you will, I know, be at it with "tother glassie," and our mistress, though she will not partake, yet will stand by, clap her hands, and encourage you to it; for my part I think I will best make Arent⁴ my vice-governor, who may often repeat to you his "wil ghy wel laeten."

The second letter, dated 29th December, 1686, makes further reference to the controversy between Furly and the Baptist Colonel. Locke says :

Methinks you should have let the year have ended in peace and not have knocked an old officer in the head with blunt downright truths, against the which, the art of fencing is not provided. I fear this second seasoning you have sent him will spoil his Christmas cheer; for your ingredients are very strong, and the dose something of the largest.

He concludes the letter by saying he encloses a present for one of the children, and wishes to be "remembered very kindly to Mrs. Furly our friend, and the young ones, especially Arent."

Locke himself appears to have taken some part in the controversy with the Baptist Colonel, as he writes on 20th February, 1687 :

As the Colonel is gone, I am glad with you that *our* MSS. stayed; 'tis something to comfort us in the loss of those notable discoveries we might have expected. I wish your heretical pravity and perverseness have had no hand in this tragedy. And may I not justly suspect what you call Colic, was heart breaking? I warned you long since what effect such kind of dealing might have on an old soldier and author.

He closes the letter by asking Furly to get someone going to England to carry a little book of philosophie but of four sheets and yet has nothing in it of affairs. Do me the kindness to send me word, for I am in distress to send one of my Epitomes. It will take up no more place than a letter.

⁴ Arent, Furly's second son, was Secretary to Charles, Earl of Peterborough, General and Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's Land Forces serving in the expedition against Spain; several of the orders dated in the camp before Bacelona, in 1705, are countersigned by Arent Furly, who, it is clear, must have left the Quakers before he could have accompanied Lord Peterborough.

There is evidence in a letter from Shaftesbury to Benjamin Furly, dated St. Giles, Nov. 4, 1702, that Charles, Earl of Peterborough, had written to Furly "*re* the preferring of some young man of your recommendation to his service in his great employment." Shaftesbury recommends that "it is better that this favour should be for Mr. Arent; since being your own son, a kind of foster child too to Mr. Locke, my Lord's great friend, he can enjoy the fruits of your recommendation and carry the force of your own and Friends interest with my lord, much better than a stranger can do."

Locke's silence between February and July, 1687, appears to have caused Mrs. Furly to think there was some offence; but this fear was removed by Locke's letter of 30th July, 1687, when he writes:

One cannot take amiss the mistakes of one's friends. But I should be sorry to have given any just occasion to your wives misapprehension. Had she been better acquainted with my way of living with those I am free with, she would have known that silence, when I have no business to write, is a liberty I take with none so much with the Friends I am most assured of, and with whom I think myself past ceremony. . . . This be sure I was anything rather than sullen; and I was so far from taking any offence, that I am not displeased at the opportunity of acknowledging, once for all, that I was never any where with more freedom and satisfaction. This to your wife to whom pray give my kindest remembrances. As for yourself, if I mistake not very much you and I are past these discourses.

In his letter of 6th January, 1688, he sends Furly a book about the "Quietists," called *Recueil des diverse Pièces concernant le Quietisme*, which costs 13s., and again remembers the children. Arent, whom he has nicknamed Teotie, is threatened with the loss of his usual present when Locke returns if he continues to grow stout, "and that, when I come, Jantie shall be my friend, and he no more."

That Furly influenced Locke a good deal is almost certain; the period of their friendship was that when Locke was busy with his famous *Essay on the Human Understanding*, and there is not the least doubt that Furly's library of over 4,000 volumes would be of great service to him. In a letter dated 19th January, 1688, Locke chides himself for arrears in correspondence; but excuses himself by saying he has been busy finishing his essay, *De Intellectu*, and goes on to write:

Had I not certain proofs that you are Pretty Good Enough in your own nature, I should suspect that you handle me thus smoothly with design to draw me in to be "hereticated" by you. The truth is, I find you have gone a great way towards spoiling of me already.

Both Locke and Furly were well acquainted with William Penn. Locke, it would appear, had met with Penn while in Oxford; both were ex-students of Christ Church College, and had in common the friendship of Dr. John Owen. Locke's biographer says Locke had

known William Penn as a promising youth in Oxford, and had probably, then and afterwards, helped in unrecorded ways.⁵ Penn endeavoured to obtain the King's pardon for Locke in the year 1685, but Locke refused it, saying "he had no occasion for a pardon, having been guilty of no crime." Locke, in his letter of 26th January, 1688, seeks Furdy's help for a friend named Weinstein, who hopes for his assistance in the "intercession of the governor of Pennsylvania, to help him out of the briars." He asks for a reply by Tuesday, to be sent to his brother, "who may deliver it, if there be occasion to our Friend W.P[enn]."

Locke's further interest in Furdy's children is evidenced in his letter of 2nd February, 1688, when he sends a copy book for writing exercise, being an alphabet of names, drawn chiefly from Furdy's family; he also gives medical advice for one of the children that is ill.

The death of Mrs. Furdy, in 1690, formed the subject of one of the last letters which passed between the two, and is dated from Oates,⁶ 28th April, 1690 :

Dear Friend,

Though I am very much concerned and troubled for your very great loss, yet your sorrow being of that kind which time and not arguments is wont to cure, I know not whether I should say anything to you to abate your grief, but that, it serving to no purpose at all but making you thereby the more unfit to supply the loss of their mother to your remaining children (who now more need your care, help and comfort) the sooner you get rid of it, the better it will be both for them and you. If you are convinced this is fit to be done I need not make use to you of the common though yet reasonable topics of consolation. I know you expect not to have the common and unalterable law of mortality which reaches the greatest, be dispensed with for your sake. Our friends and relations are but borrowed advantages lent us during pleasure, and must be given back when ever called for; for we receive them upon those terms, and why should we repine? or, if we do, what profits it us? But I see my affection is running into reasoning, which you need not; and can think of without any suggestions of mine. I wonder not at the greatness of your grief, but I shall wonder if you let it prevail on you; your thinking of retiring some whither from business was very natural upon the first stroke of it, but here I must interpose to advise you the contrary. It is to give yourself up to all the ills that grief and melancholy can produce,

⁵ H. R. Fox Bourne, *Life of Locke*, ii. 23.

⁶ Oates, near Laver, in Essex. Locke resided here for a time at the house of Sir Francis Masham; and died here in 1704.

which are some of the worst we suffer in this life : want of health, want of spirit, want of useful thought, is the state of those that abandon themselves to griefs, whereof business is the best, the safest, and quickest cure.

Locke returned to England on 12th February, 1688, and he did not forget the Friends, attending their meeting once at least, as is shown by a letter of his to a woman Friend, Rebecca Collier, and her companion Rachel Brecon, which is as follows⁷ :

Grays Inn,
November 21st, 1699.

My Sweet Friends,

A paper of sweetmeats by the bearer to attend your journey, comes to testify the sweetness I found in your society. I admire no converse more than Christian freedom, and fear no bondage like that of pride and prejudice. I now see that an acquaintance by sight cannot reach the height of enjoyment, which acquaintance by knowledge arrives unto. Outward hearing may misguide us but internal knowledge cannot err. We have something there of what we shall have hereafter, to know as we are known, and thus we with our other friends were even at the first view mutual partakers, and the more there is of this in the life, the less we need enquire of what country, nation, party or persuasion our friends are, for our own knowledge is more sure than another's is to us, thus we know in whom we have believed.

Now the God of all grace grant you may hold fast that grace of love and charity, that unbiassed and unbounded love, which if it decay not will spring up mightily as the waters of the sanctuary, higher and higher untill you with the universal Church swim together in the ocean of divine love.

⁷ Locke's letter appears in *The Annual Monitor* for 1828, preceded by a paragraph as follows :—" This letter was sent to Rebecca Collier, a member of the Society of Friends, after a meeting held in London, which he and King William III. attended, the latter incognito. It was accompanied by two papers of sweetmeats, one for Rebecca, and one for her companion, Rachel Bracken (to which the letter alluded). This meeting was so agreeable to Locke, that it removed his objections to a female ministry." The letter is dated 1696.

The letter also appears in Hare's *Gurneys of Earham*, 1895, i. 237, where the addressee is given as Rebecca Collins, and the date 1696. A question relative to this Friend appeared in *Quakeriana*, Dec. 1895 (ii. 184), but has remained unanswered.

There are two MSS. in D. containing this letter, one is written on paper with the watermark 1809. The latter gives the date 1699, and the Friends R. Collier and R. Brecon, while the former has Collier and Buckon.

In no case is there any reference to the source of the quotation. Nothing more is at hand regarding either Friend.

John Locke's views on women's preaching may be gathered from his Paraphrase on Paul's Epistles, see *Extracts* from this printed for John Hull in 1832.—[ED.]

Women indeed had the honour first to publish the resurrection of the God of love, why not again the resurrection of the spirit of love? And let all the disciples of our Lord rejoice therein as does your partner

JOHN LOCKE.

Benjamin Furly also had business and personal relations with Algernon Sidney. On 29th November, 1677, Sidney writes to him telling him of the death of his father, and asking his advice in reference to transmitting a large sum to France, where he intends to go for the purpose of buying an estate in Gascony, and settling down. On 13th April, 1678, Sidney writes to Benjamin Furly again, and tells him much of what is transpiring in England. Among other things he tells him of the trial of the Earl of Pembroke for murder, and also of the business concerning Friends in the House of Commons. He writes :

Your Friends seem to have succeeded well in the last week, before the Committee of the House of Commons, as to being distinguished from Papists, and it is hoped that if the House sit long enough to perfect that business, they will find ways of exempting them from the penalties of the laws made against those that in no degree resemble them ; nevertheless I find many Parliament men very bitter upon them in private conversation, as I think without knowing why.

In a letter of Sidney's, dated 31st January, 1678/9, there is a reference to an interesting money transaction with certain Friends.⁸ He writes :

Gerard Roberts who was to have paid me £297 10 0 the 16th of April last, has dealt very vilely with me, and Will : Mead and John Osgood who have the management of his business, not at all better, and to say the truth I having forborne to trouble him for my mony at Wm Penn's desire, as his friend and a man of exceeding good repute, amongst those of his own profession, could not find more niggling, shifting, cavilling, and indeed downright lying and knavery from the men of the worst repute in London, than I do from all three of them, and particularly Mead and Osgood are much more inclinable to cast unjust reproaches upon Wm Penn, than to do me the justice he adviseth, which, together with what is suspected of John Swinton, and hath fallen out with some others, will much impair the credit those of your profession have hitherto had.

Sidney goes on to deal with what is expected of the new Parliament, and writes :

⁸ The reference to this money transaction is omitted in the second edition of the Letters, published in 1847.

It is generally thought, men will be chosen everywhere that are averse to the Court, but some think those may come in who are more favourable to non-conformists, but I do not, seeing the same spirit still rules, that is as full of bitterness towards them as ever. I am

Your truly affectionate friend,

AL. SIDNEY.

Other letters refer to the best course of business to pursue as a consequence of the war, and the investment of money for Algernon Sidney's friends outside England for safety.

On 9th March, 1678/9, he again refers to the business with Roberts, Osgood and Meade. He writes :

The business of G. Roberts is certainly naught in all extremity, and the reputation Mead and Osgood had in your Society will make it prove of more prejudice unto the whole, than the gain they can be of advantage unto themselves. All that I now expect is, by W. Penn his interposition to get my money with the loss of three or four score pounds, and to be paid I know not when.

Other letters refer to the printing of a book, the Act for restraining the press being expired. And also the purchase of horses for the Earl of Essex.

Sidney, on his death in 1682, bequeathed to Benjamin Furly a large silver drinking cup, about eight inches in height. This was in the possession of Dr. T. Forster, of Walthamstow, as late as 1830.

It would be interesting to know what effect these friendships had on those who so rigorously persecuted Friends in this period. It would certainly not help to ease the persecution at all.

Locke, while in Holland, was making the acquaintance of the Prince of Orange, afterwards William III., and also the Duke of Monmouth. He was suspected of sending to England treasonable literature; his theology and philosophy and politics were all suspected. Algernon Sidney was indicted for plotting against the King, and was beheaded on Tower Hill, 7th December, 1682. The third Lord Shaftesbury, also friendly with Furly and a constant correspondent, was also a suspect at Court.

These relationships would be known by all in power; the system of spies and informers was too well developed for this to be otherwise. We know that the insurrection led by the Duke of Monmouth exercised Friends a good

deal in Essex, and certificates had to be signed and attested by churchwardens, overseers, etc., to show that Friends were in nowise concerned against the King. Church and State were then more closely allied than ever since, and it would need very little to lend colour to the idea that Quakers as such were desirous of overthrowing the Stuart throne, especially as many of the rank and file of Friends had been in the army of Cromwell.

Whether this be so or not, it is very likely that the kindness shown by Dutch Friends to Locke and Shaftesbury whilst exiles, helped to minimise the persecution when once William of Orange became King of England.

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Benjamin Furly and his Library

THE catalogue of Benjamin Furly's library, a copy of which is in D., and another copy of which is in the British Museum, shows Furly to have been a very large collector of books and rare MSS. The letters, preserved in the British Museum, between John Locke and Furly show that he used his friends in the work of collecting.

Some account of Furly and his Library is given in the Memoirs of Zacharias Von Uffenbach, who visited Rotterdam in 1710; he had been a classmate, at Halle, of Justus Falkner, one of the early German Quietists in Pennsylvania, and later was attorney for Furly.¹

He writes :

On the morning of November 21st [1710] we went Op Te-Haaring Vliet to visit Benj. Furley an English Merchant, who was the chief of the Quakers in Holland, and possesses an enormous stock of books, mainly *suspectæ fidei*; he lives in a very fine house, and is a man of about seventy years of age, and of peculiar actions [sonderbaren Wesen].

We were ushered into his *comptoir* as it was called, but this appeared more like a library or museum than a mercantile counting house, as the

¹ See *The German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania*, vol. i.