

Elizabeth Hooton

EMILY MANNERS is to be congratulated upon the "Life of Elizabeth Hooton," which forms Supplement No. 12 to THE JOURNAL. It is to be hoped that her success will lead to similar work being done for other pioneers of the Quaker movement—for William Dewsbury and Francis Howgill, for Edward Burrough and James Nayler. The renewed interest in historical study could not spend itself better than by revivifying for us the great names of our past, with the help of the rich materials in the Reference Library at Devonshire House.

It is fitting that one of the first of these adequate Quaker biographies should be that of the woman who was the nursing-mother of the Children of the Light who gathered round Fox in Nottinghamshire in 1648. Elizabeth Hooton had "Joyned with y^e Baptists but after some time finding them y^t they were not upright hearted to y^e Lord but did his work negligently and she haveing testified ag^t their deceit Left y^m who in those parts soon after were scatered & gone." This looks as though she had been a Baptist preacher before she became the earliest Quaker woman preacher; and she may be the person referred to in Edwards' *Gangræna*, (1646 edn., Second Division, p. 29) as preaching, or even baptizing, in the low-lying part of Lincolnshire called Holland.

A woman of firm and bold character, she suffered four imprisonments during the Commonwealth period for rebuking "priests." One minister was so enraged at the sight of her that he knocked her down and ducked her as she was passing quietly along the road. Her inside knowledge of prisons led her to make a striking appeal to the authorities as to their condition. "Her protests against strong drink, her plea for the separation of the sexes and for the employment of the prisoners reads more like an appeal from Elizabeth Fry two centuries later."

In 1661 and following years, Elizabeth Hooton, then about sixty, paid two visits to New England and deliberately braved the cruelty of the Massachusetts persecutors. The following is but one specimen of the barbarities which she suffered :

Then they there tyed us both to y^e carts taile y^e youngman & J in y^t cold weather & stript us as usual to y^e middle & there whipt us from whence they had us to Medfield, & would fain have whipt us there also, w^{ch} y^e Preist desired & sought much for o^r bloud but could not obtaine it, So y^e Constable wth his long sword went wth anothe^r man to guard us out of their Jurisdiction, into y^e woods & left us to goe 20 miles in y^e night among y^e Bears & wild beasts & wat^{rs} & yet we were preserved & y^e Constable when he saw me returne lift up his hands & said he never expected to see me againe, And allwayes they drive us toward Road Isl being a place of liberty to us.

On one occasion she was moved of the Lord to go in sackcloth and ashes to Governor Endicott's house to bear her testimony against the persecutors ; and at Cambridge, Mass., where they were very thirsty for blood, she cried repentance through part of the town, and was thrown into a dark dungeon without bread or water for two days and nights. A Friend brought her some milk and was fined £5 for his act of mercy. She ends the recital of her sufferings by saying, " had not y^e Lord been on my side J had utterly failed."

On her return to England in 1666, she expostulated with the King for the banishment to which Friends were subjected under the Conventicle Act of 1664. The punishment was devised for a third offence under the Act, and of all the nonconformists, Friends were, I believe, the only ones who braved it out to this last heroic witness. And in their case, though upwards of two hundred received sentence, less than a score were actually transported. The weapon broke in the hands of the persecutors, for the shipmasters had got the salutary notion into their heads that no Englishman should be carried out of his country against his will. Elizabeth Hooton speaks of " an old vissited ship w^{ch} was rotten, & leaked water," in which many had died, and the rest had gone to some uncertain fate, perhaps, she thought, to be taken by the Dutch. The reference is to the *Black Eagle*, into which fifty-five Friends were put in mid-August, at the

height of the Plague. The ship lay seven weeks in the Thames, during which time half the prisoners died, many being buried in the marshes below Gravesend. It did not reach Plymouth till February, 1666, and a few hours after it had sailed for America, it was taken by a Dutch privateer, and reached Holland *viâ* Bergen in Norway, where the Quakers had distributed their books to curious visitors. They were soon set at liberty by the Dutch, and thus, as Sewel says, "the design of their persecutors was brought to nought by an Almighty hand."

Emily Manners gives us other instances of the brave woman's outspoken rebukes to highly-placed oppressors. Nothing could daunt her daring. To the King she says: "How oft haue J come to thee in my old age, both for thy reformation and safety, for the good of thy soule And for Justice and equity. Oh that thou would not giue thy Kingdome to y^e papists nor thy strength to weomen."

She had a great esteem for George Fox. In a paper dated 13th August, 1667, which might have been given at length, addressed to disaffected Friends, she says: "You do not only envy George Fox, whom God hath set as a pillar in His temple because he hath stood fast from the beginning and hath been a faithful steward in God's work, but your enmity is against God and Christ." Some twenty-four years older than the founder of Quakerism, "Goody Hooton," as he calls her, looked on Fox with motherly affection, and, when he projected his visit to America in the summer of 1671, she, in her seventieth or seventy-first year, felt the call to join the party "to doe y^e best that Js Required for him," presumably from mending his stockings to tending him in illness. They reached Barbados, and the last letter we have of hers, addressed to some island magnate, expresses her simple but sufficient Quaker creed: "Soe Returne to the Light in thy Consciene w^{ch} will not let the doe any Wrong to any if thou be Obedient to Jt." They went forward to Jamaica, where she fell ill and died. James Lancaster, one of the party, says:

Shee looked vpon me and J [on] her. My life rose towards her and allsoe her life answered mine again with greate Joy betwixt vs and shee said, It is well, James, thou art come; and fastened her arms aboute me and said, Blessed be the lord god that has made vs partakers

of those heuenly mercies, and more words to the like effecte; and embraced me with a kisse and laid her selfe Downe; and turned her selfe on her side; and soe her breath went weaker and weaker till it was gone from her; and soe passed away as though shee had beene asleep; and none knew of her departure but as her breath was gone.

Fox wrote that she died "in peace like a lamb," and asked that her son Oliver should gather up all her papers and her sufferings and send them to London that her life and death might be printed. His sound historical instinct made him recognize the importance of her life in the story of the Quaker movement. We have references, in the "Children of the Light" papers in **D.** (Portfolio 10), to a History by Oliver Hooton, which contained particulars of Elizabeth Hooton's early life, but neither this nor any other life seems to have been printed. Emily Manners, accordingly, for the first time, collects the known facts respecting the first woman-preacher among Friends.

The book has some good illustrations, including the village of Skegby, where Elizabeth Hooton had her home, the photograph of a letter to Fox in 1653, Beckingham Church, one of the churches where she disturbed the minister, and the Gateway of Lincoln Castle, where she was imprisoned for this offence.

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In conjunction with Eliza H. Varney, an appointed evening meeting in a Union Chapel was about to conclude. John Dillingham knelt in prayer. With much fervency he pleaded for several conditions and several classes, then as if a moment hesitating, his supplication was for "any widow whose husband may still be living." As the meeting concluded, one who sat by the Friend who had arranged the meeting turned to him somewhat sharply with the question, "Why did you tell him that?" In a moment it was evident to the interrogator that no previous knowledge of the condition thus strikingly pictured had been possessed by any of the Friends, and he confessed his amazement at the distinct leading of the Holy Spirit, in what proved in good measure to have been a healing ministration.

John H. Dillingham, by J. Henry Bartlett, 1912, pp. 131, 132.