

“Quaker Women”¹

THE books written about Quakers by non-members of the Society are few in number and by no means always a success. Instances can be recalled when the author has proved peculiarly unfitted for the task, because of a total lack of understanding of the Quaker inspiration. But, given the insight and critical judgment needful for a biographer, together with impartial and clear comprehension, it is easy to see that the application of an unbiassed mind may bring out sometimes unsuspected aspects of history.

The present volume about Quaker Women is a case in point. There is a remarkable freshness in the view of this writer, Mabel Richmond Brailsford, who is quite unconnected with the Society of Friends, either by descent or education. And withal there is no lack of such knowledge, as even an inherited Friend might envy, of the inner springs of thought, and the resultant action of the early apostles of the new sect. For it is from the early history of the Society, in the eventful last half of the seventeenth century, that nearly all her examples of Quaker women are drawn. The reiterated facts and familiar details of the period seem to attain an extraordinary vivacity in the light of Miss Brailsford's penetration and acumen. She is a psychologist of ability, as well as a writer of crisp and sprightly English. Her style of narrative certainly owes nothing to the nature of her subject, although it is by no means unsuited thereto. She has a happy knack of seizing on words or phrases spoken by, or written about, the persons in the story, which sometimes reveal rudimental traits. Several of these picturesque expressions also convey a very seasonable humour. It was perhaps unavoidable that owing to the scheme of the survey to be made, there should be a certain lack of cohesion in the construction

¹ *Quaker Women, 1650-1690.* By Mabel Richmond Brailsford. London: Duckworth & Co., 1915, pp. xii., 340. Cr. 8vo. 7s. 6d. net.

of her book. In approaching different events of the times, and in viewing their reflex action upon so many diverse characters, some of the ground has necessarily to be gone over again; it offers, however, the opportunity for some new phase to receive attention, and bare repetition is generally avoided. The excellent background of contemporary history is invariably there, often with interesting sidelights upon an outside view of the Quakers as shown occasionally in the literature of the day. The figures are never detached from the background and set apart and alone, as in so many of our Quaker classics. (To this Fox's *Journal* is a very notable exception; he is always in close touch with his environment.) These Quaker Women remain moving and being among the human forces of their neighbours, as much a part of daily history as the knightly figures riding across a tapestry landscape.

It was no doubt the public service undertaken by the early Quaker women with the same intrepidity as, if not more than, their brethren, that attracted Miss Brailsford to her subject. The question of how far the women Friends of the present have evolved as the result of this heritage is a highly interesting one that cannot be entered upon here. The author's acquaintance with the aspirations towards a wider share of service and citizenship on the part of women to-day has influenced to a certain extent her reading. Her book was, we believe, completed early last year, when these things bore a different proportion. She would be the first to acknowledge how associations formed for one purpose have now one and all devoted their energies to the common cause of humanity, and should prove a very valuable asset in the forces growing towards a future peace.

Many old familiar friends are met again in the circle to which, as intimates, the author re-admits us. Elizabeth Hooton and Margaret Fell once more compel our wondering admiration. We suspect Miss Brailsford of a peculiar partiality for Mary Fisher, “a servant girl apostle to the Colleges,” and “a maiden ambassador to the Grand Turk.” And indeed the whole story of her life, preaching and travels is a romance, ending in a proper way in a marriage for love to that

mystical mariner, William Bayly, whose vision, while a prisoner in the foul and wicked purlieus of Newgate, was of "a woman with the face of an Angel" between him and a man with a great axe who was about to cut him in pieces. This was Mary Fisher, whose daily visits to the prison were appointed, as Ellwood tells us, by the Meeting at Devonshire House, two women to each prison. But beside these and other notable women of achievements known and recorded, the author has unearthed for us and presented portraits in miniature of lesser known women. Barbara Blaugdon, the "middle aged and highly respectable governess," who had been the intimate of titled and noble families, who interviewed Henry Cromwell, was whipped at Exeter, crossed several times to Ireland and preached to rich and poor, is known already through her autobiography; but what of Elizabeth Fletcher, the girl of sixteen who preached in Oxford, and with Elizabeth Smith was the pioneer Quaker in Ireland. Ann Downer and Rebecca Travers, responsible for the first "Women's Meeting" in London, are known a little; they and Loveday Hambly, Sarah Blackbury, Ann Clayton, become real persons through these pages. The travels of Katherine Evans and Sarah Chevers in the British Isles and to Malta where they were imprisoned, are told afresh. The chapter on "The First Quaker Women in Holland" contains some valuable original information, and in "A Stuart among the Quakers" the romantic story of Jane Stuart, a natural daughter of James II., is told at length.

The chapter entitled "Husband and Wife" is not the least fresh and interesting in the volume. Fox's ideas upon celibacy and "right marriage" are clearly stated, and the extraordinary precautions taken by him in laying down the obligations connected with the actual union. The austere view taken by some of the early Friends, even so fine a woman as Margaret Fell, on the natural relationships of life, is exemplified in the interesting case of Thomas and Elizabeth Holme. Both were preachers, and the public duty of each was constantly enforced upon them by their elders. All human ties were to be in abeyance when the work of the pioneers

was in question. So it is we find Edward Burrough writing about the death of his parents in 1658 in a northern dale in Westmorland. He, a mere youth, was in London and did not suffer his hand to falter a moment at the news. He writes coldly :

Y^e old man & old woman, my father & mother according to y^e flesh is both departed this world ten dayes one after y^e other, & I am sent for downe, but trully I Cannot goe, it is only p^taining to Outwards, & I feele noe freedome to it at present.

Enough has been said to show that we have here a valuable contribution to a branch of Quaker history that has been little explored as a whole. Miss Brailsford has given us a study of womanhood that cannot be without an influence on all who, reading it, recognise that unity of man and woman in a common work and heritage which is the hope and destiny of the race.

It must be added that the index is totally inadequate. The value of such a book as this would be greatly enhanced to all present and future students by a proper and scholarly one. Perhaps the author will see fit to remedy this fault when the volume, as no doubt it will, proceeds to a second edition.

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Yearly Meeting Representatives

THOUGH some of the names of attenders at the early "General" and Yearly Meetings are known, the names of representatives were not kept in any list for some years. The Epistle from Friends out of the Northern Counties, as far back as 1658, has many signatures; the "written Epistle from the Yearly Meeting, 1668," contains the signatures of George Fox and others; that of 1675 has six signatures, and that for 1676 the signatures of William Penn, George Whitehead and thirteen others. But we have, as far as is known, no list of representatives until 1681. The number of the representatives is stated in the record of the proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of 1672 "to consist of six Friends for the city of London, three for the