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Communications should be addressed to the Editor of the *Journal*
c/o The Library, Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ.

A NEW LETTER TO GEORGE FOX

The discovery of a new, and early, letter to George Fox is of considerable interest. Extant letters to him from others than Friends are far to seek; and the writer, Morgan Llwyd, minister of the Congregational church at Wrexham, is a radical Puritan under constant investigation by students of the history and literature of Wales.¹ The discovery of the letter might more exactly be termed the identification of its recipient. The letter's existence has been known for some time, but only now is it in print, without date and to a nameless correspondent.² The evidence that it was written to Fox, though indirect, is substantial and, cumulatively, convincing.

Fox's statement in his *Journal* that in 1653 the 'preist at Rexam in Wales one ffloyde ... sent two of his preachers into ye north to try us & see what a manner of people wee was', with the result that one of the two, John ap John, 'stands a fine minister for Christ to this day',³ has often attracted attention;⁴ with what is known of the visit to Wrexham of Richard Hubberthorne and John Lawson, two of the 'First Publishers of Truth', in the following October, it provides a dramatic account of the first impact of Quakerism in Wales.⁵ From his side, Llwyd's continuing though hesitant attraction to the Quaker message is likewise apparent from a number of passages in his correspondence. In 1654 he was asking Peter Sterry about Friends; in 1655-6 he was enquiring about Quaker books, and received a number from a friend in London; in 1656 he referred to Quakers as those 'who seeme at least to be more pure than

the rest'; and in correspondence with Richard Baxter in 1656-7 he was still more favourable to Friends than Baxter liked.⁶

A clue to the context and date of the letter under review is the name mentioned in it of T. Rawlinson: 'To him that told mee of some dissatisfaction I spake before', Llwyd writes, '(I meane T. Rawlinson) at whose carriage wee were here grieved & are desirious to deale further with him as with a friend'. Thomas Rawlinson, a Friend from Graythwaite (south of Hawkshead) and one of the 'First Publishers', had been present at the meeting in July 1653 when John ap John and his companion came from Wrexham on their visit of inquiry. This we know from a letter written to Fox, ten days after the meeting, by James Nayler, who had also been present. Whereas John ap John was 'convinced', Nayler writes, 'y^e other ... did mutter to Thos. Rollison against the Judgement which had taken hould on him'.⁷ Rawlinson was well known to Fox: he had been with him at his trial at Lancaster, and also during his imprisonment at Carlisle.⁸

Before we pursue this further, we may advert to the only other personal name in Llwyd's letter, that of Thomas Tillam. 'You have acted according to your light in Tho. Tillams,' Llwyd writes, '& I according to mine in breaking bread at Chester, for I have knowen & examined divers of them, & found them seekers after God, not daring to speake against the Godhead of Jesus'.

Llwyd's reference here to Chester is to be linked with a letter he wrote on 25 March 1651 'To the Heaven-Borne Children, Beloved of God, called to be saints ... now sojourning in West Chester', in which he refers to the 'great ould And yett new Controversye' among them, and urges them to 'Acknowledge Christ in God to be the Eternal wisdome and only God', as over against merely 'nominall Christians' who 'Crucifie his God head'.⁹

The church at Chester for which Llwyd was concerned had been going through troubled times. Its protector was Colonel Robert Duckenfield, of Dukinfield Hall, Dukinfield, High Sheriff of Cheshire and in 1653 M.P. for Cheshire in the Barebones Parliament.¹⁰ With his support his chaplain, Samuel Eaton,¹¹ had gathered a Congregational church that met in the chapel of Dukinfield Hall.¹² When in 1650 Duckenfield was appointed Governor of Chester, Eaton moved with him, to be chaplain to the garrison there, and a church (or more exactly another congregation of 'the Church in Cheshire' meeting both at Dukinfield and at Chester) was gathered at Chester, meeting for worship in the Castle.¹³ Soon, however, Eaton returned to Dukinfield. To his distress his successor at Chester (also, presumably, under Duckenfield's patronage), John Knowles, proved to be an ardent

Socinianizer.¹⁴ Before the end of the year he too was gone, but not before Eaton had sent to Chester arguments for Christ's divinity, and Knowles had published them together with his reply. In July John Whittell was hauled before the Council of State for issuing this piece,¹⁵ which was evidently held to be dangerously blasphemous; and it was to John Whittell that Llwyd added a postscript to his letter, requesting its communication 'to them that are taught of God in Chester'. These were the people, bemused by the Christological dispute between their ministers and now with no resident pastor, to whom Llwyd went over from Wrexham to administer the sacrament. They had further suffered from the attentions of Thomas Tillam, but he too had now left them for a Lectureship at Hexham in Northumberland.¹⁶

Thomas Tillam, whom Llwyd mentions, was a 'mercurial'¹⁷ figure, 'forceful and often impetuous',¹⁸ who, like Llwyd, has of late been much studied. At first an Independent, he became a Baptist, a Fifth Monarchist, a Seventh-Day man;¹⁹ he eventually led a millenarian group to settle in the Palatinate. In the summer of 1650, 18 months before he went to Hexham, Tillam had gone, as he tells us himself, '(by a clear call from God and Saints) to preach in Cheshire, where I saw the Lords power; and there I incurred Mr. Eaton's displeasure.'²⁰ Hence Llwyd's mention of Tillam and the church at Chester in the same sentence.

Why should Llwyd mention Tillam? Because Tillam had gone to Chester from Wrexham, where he had been in membership, and briefly an elder, before withdrawing under a cloud.²¹ Though he claimed that he left Wrexham on his own initiative, Samuel Eaton, who became involved in print with Tillam as well as with Knowles, claimed that Tillam was 'excommunicated by the church at Wrexham, and afterwards his Excommunication was found and declared just by the Church in Duckenfield.'²² The church in Cheshire and the church at Wrexham were sister churches, and, just as Llwyd was concerned for Chester, so Dukinfield was concerned for Wrexham.²³

If we now ask whether Tillam's name and the church in Cheshire would mean anything to George Fox, the answer (perhaps surprisingly) is that they would. A few pages before recording the visit of John ap John and his companion from Wrexham, Fox relates that he passed through Northumberland till he came 'to Hexam'. Here 'wee had a great meeting a toppe of a hill where ye preist came not though hee had threatned'.²⁴ The note of scorn here is in keeping with the tone of a letter Fox sent 'To the people of Hexham':²⁵ he was confident, expecting to dispute, and to have the victory. His language - 'I am the light of the world and do enlighten everyman that cometh' - echoes the

phraseology deemed at his trial to be blasphemous;²⁶ though it is fair to note that at Hexham 'all was turned to ye light of Christ', and at a less *exalté* level his language answers to Llwyd's words 'You have acted according to your light in Tho. Tillams'. Tillam is found engaging with Friends in the following year;²⁷ and when in 1657 he published *The Seventh-Day Sabbath sought out and celebrated*, Fox did not miss it and returned *An Answer* (1659),²⁸ as well as replying to it in *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore* (1659).

Fox also knew of the church in Cheshire. After their visit to Wrexham in October 1653 Hubberthorne and Lawson 'went back into Cheshire' and in a letter from Chester to Margaret Fell and others Lawson tells of the 'sort of people who are separated from the priests' in the city, 'who are in fellowship among themselves'.³⁰ With the other branch of the church Fox himself was acquainted, for in 1647, in the course of his early wanderings, he had had a brush with Samuel Eaton in Dukinfield: 'I went among the Professors at Duckenfield and Manchester,' he writes, 'where I stay'd a while and declared Truth among them ... the Professors were in a Rage'.³¹ So early in his account place-names are almost non-existent, and one wonders why Dukinfield remained etched in his memory. Possibly the anti-trinitarianism which was rife at Dukinfield³² as well as at Chester was present there from the beginning: these early pages of the *Journal* are notable for their firm high Christology. Fox did not return to Dukinfield but left it to other Friends: in November 1653 Eaton published *The Quakers Confuted: being an Answer unto nineteen Queries ... sent to the Elders of the Church of Duckinfield ... with an Answer to a Letter ... written by one of them (R. Waller)* (1654), together with the letter in question from Richard Waller, a Friend who had once been a member of Eaton's church.³³

In his letter from Chester Lawson writes that, when Hubberthorne and he were at Wrexham 'the priest was silent, Richard laid more judgment on him, the priest sat sobbing'. Here we see 'convincement' at work, what in the psychology of conversion is called 'conviction' under judgment, often accompanied by self-abasement before someone with charismatic power. It is the perfect scenario for the burden of Llwyd's letter to his unnamed 'Deare and Honoured' correspondent. 'I am a child & a foole,' Llwyd writes. 'You have stood long in the gap, & reioyced many, you have been a stake in the hedge & a flower in the garden also'. 'I M. Ll. that write this is as dung & durt'. In none of his other numerous extant letters does Llwyd write remotely like this. To whom could he conceivably have been writing but Fox?

Llwyd's letter is part of a correspondence. He opens it with the words 'What you have written' and closes it with a humble defence of a former

letter from himself. We have no other letter from Llwyd to Fox, but there is a record of a letter from Fox 'To the priest of Rixsom in Wales', with the opening words 'Friend, thy desire is, that we would write unto thee'. In a paper in Nayler's hand which has been identified as a copy of this letter, but which is more probably a second letter, brought by Hubberthorne and Lawson in October, Fox writes 'freind thou hast tasted of y^e power of god, & a light is raised up in the, but there is a mixture in thy voyce'.³⁴ It is to this letter that Llwyd is replying. 'I may not yet expresse the mixtures of heart in that kind,' he writes: 'I intended no quibs but love'. 'I am persuaded you will become dayly as a little child more & more'. 'I hope I shall not mistake that blessed spirit inhabiteth in you which also is knowen in yours, Mor. Llwyd'.³⁵

All things considered, there cannot be much doubt that Llwyd's letter was written to George Fox, and may be dated to the second half of 1653, probably to November of that year.

Geoffrey F. Nuttall

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ See M. Wynn Thomas, *Morgan Llwyd* (Writers of Wales: Cardiff, 1984), 77-9 (bibliography: critical and biographical studies); to which may be added M. Wynn Thomas, 'Disgybl a'i Athro: Morgan Llwyd a Walter Cradoc', in *Agweddau ar dwf Piwritaniaeth yng Nghymru yn yr ail ganrif ar bymtheg* (Welsh Studies, 6: Lewiston/Queenston/Llanbedr Pont Steffan, 1992), ed. J. Gwynfor Jones, 111-27, and G.F. Nuttall, 'A Parcel of Books for Morgan Llwyd', *J.F.H.S.*, 56.3 (1992), 180-8.
- ² *Gweithiau Morgan Llwyd o Wynedd*, iii (Caerdydd, 1994), ed. J. Graham Jones and Goronwy Wyn Owen, item 81, pp.196-7.
- ³ George Fox, *Journal* (Cambridge, 1911), ed. N. Penney, i.141.
- ⁴ Cf. W.C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1955), 123, with footnotes, and with additional notes by Henry J. Cadbury on p.557.
- ⁵ See G.F. Nuttall, *The Welsh Saints 1640-1660: Walter Cradock, Vavasor Powell, Morgan Llwyd* (Cardiff, 1957), ch. IV ('The Impact of Quakerism').
- ⁶ *Gweithiau*, iii, items 70; 64, 66 and 43; 23; 36 and 37; Baxter's side of the correspondence was published in *Gweithiau*, ii (1908), ed. J.H. Davies, 270-5.
- ⁷ Friends House Library, Swarthmore MSS. 3.60; quoted in *Welsh Saints*, 56. We know from a manuscript memorandum by John ap John (printed by W.G. Norris, *John ap John* (1907), p.6, with facsimile) that he met Fox at Swarthmore on 21 July 1653, but not the exact date of the meeting at Kendal at which he was 'convinced', probably a few days earlier.
- ⁸ *Journal*, i.64, 121.
- ⁹ *Gweithiau*, iii, item 22, pp.47, 50, 49.
- ¹⁰ For Duckenfield, see *D.N.B.*; *Historical Sketches of Nonconformity in the County Palatine of Chester* (1864), [ed. W. Urwick], 340; *Extracts from State Papers relating to Friends 1654 to 1672* (1913), ed. N. Penney, 110; Tai Liu, *Discord in Zion: the Puritan Divines and the Puritan Revolution 1640-1660* (The Hague, 1973), 140-1.

- ¹¹ For Samuel Eaton, see *D.N.B.*; *Calamy Revised* (Oxford, 1934), ed. A.G. Matthews, s.v.; Anne Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains 1642-1651* (1990), 23-4; G.F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints: the Congregational Way 1640-1660* (Oxford, 1957), 31.
- ¹² This church, which 'Gangraena' Edwards termed, more rhetorically than exactly, 'the first Independent Church visible and framed that was set up in England', was defended by Eaton in *A Iust Apologie for the Church of Duckenfield* (1647); Duckenfield's son and grandson continued his patronage (J.T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry Besieged 1650-1700* (1993), 194-5, 211-12, 260, n.17), and the church still exists, though (somewhat ironically, considering Eaton's vehemence against Socinianism) as a Unitarian church: see A. Gordon, *Historical Account of Dukinfield Chapel* (1896) and [G. Hague], *The Unitarian Heritage* (1992), 82-3.
- ¹³ For this church, see *Visible Saints*, 31-2.
- ¹⁴ For John Knowles, see *D.N.B.*; H.J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1951), ch. XIII; Laurence, 143.
- ¹⁵ Cf. *C.S.P.D.* 1650, 518; this publication, *A Friendly Debate* (1650), Eaton followed up by *The Mystery of God Incarnate* (1650), with an epistle dedicatory 'To the Faithful and dearly beloved, the Saints of Jesus Christ, in, and about Chester', and by *A Vindication* (1651).
- ¹⁶ Tillam arrived at Hexham on 27 December 1651: see B.W. Bell, *The Seventh-Day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800* (Oxford, 1994), 301, n.89.
- ¹⁷ Stephen Copson, 'Advocate of the Reformed Protestant Religion: the writings (1645-58) of William Kaye, Yorkshire Puritan', in *Baptist Quarterly*, xxxv.8 (April, 1994), 232.
- ¹⁸ S.L. Copson, *Association Life of the Particular Baptists of Northern England 1699-1732* (English Baptist Records, 3; 1991), 14.
- ¹⁹ Cf. B.S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: a study in seventeenth-century English millenarianism* (1972), 266; Bell, 300-5, 268-75.
- ²⁰ Thomas Tillam, *A Christian Account* (1656), 10.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 8-11.
- ²² *Thomas Tillam his Account examined* (1657), 1 (quoting Eaton) and 9 (quoting the Dukinfield church). For alerting me to these rare tracts, the latter of which only is in W.T. Whitley, *Baptist Bibliography* (1916), 41-657, and neither of which is in Wing, and for locating them in the Bodleian Library and the Angus Library (photocopy), Regent's Park College, Oxford, I am much indebted to the Rev. S.L. Copson.
- ²³ Within this wider fellowship one could presume that Colonel Duckenfield would be known to Llwyd, as he was (*Gweithiau*, iii.121, as Puckenfield).
- ²⁴ *Journal*, i.136. Fox's visit to Hexham seems likely to have taken place after his release from imprisonment at Carlisle (from 1 August, for seven weeks); possibly his letter to Hexham (see n.25, below) was written before his imprisonment (its highflown language might suggest this) and a visit he expected to make was delayed: 'the *Journal* is here innocent of all dates' (cf. Braithwaite, 116, n.3 119).
- ²⁵ *Annual Catalogue of George Fox's Papers* (1939), ed. H.J. Cadbury, item 23, 13A; the latter is actually headed 'To the people of Hexam in Wales' and is sensibly indexed by the editor 'Hexam, see Wrexham', but the words 'in Wales' are probably a scribal addition through confusion with 'Rixsom in Wales' in item 6, 93A: the letter's tone would be out of place if addressed to Wrexham.
- ²⁶ Cf. Braithwaite, 117-18.
- ²⁷ See Tillam's postscript to Giles Firmin, *Stablishing against Shaking* (1658), postscript (quoted in *First Publishers of Truth* (1907), ed. N. Penney, 89, n.3); Edward Burrough,

- Stablishing against Quaking thrown down* (1656), 31, does not accept Tillam's account of what happened, but the date (19.3 mo. 1654) and place of the engagement are precise, and the meeting is confirmed by Swarthmore MSS., 4.209. Tillam also figures in *The Cruelty of some Fighting Priests published* (1660), 5.
- ²⁸ Tillam's tract, which Joseph Smith (*Bibliotheca Anti-Quakeriana* (1873), 426) was unable to locate, is in the Angus Library; Fox's *Answer* is in the Bevan-Naish collection in the library of Woodbrooke: for access to this and other tracts I am indebted to the Librarian, Christina Lawson.
- ²⁹ *First Publishers of Truth*, 17.
- ³⁰ Swarthmore MSS., 4.65.
- ³¹ Since the first pages of the manuscript of the *Journal* are missing, we have to depend here on the 1694 edition by Thomas Ellwood, 12; Ellwood was not averse to making alterations to the text, but did not invent incidents.
- ³² For anti-trinitarianism at Dukinfield in 1653, see Adam Martindale, *Life*, ed. R. Parkinson (Chetham Soc., O.S., 4; 1845), 110. By 1654 Eaton had left Dukinfield for Stockport (D.N.B.).
- ³³ The tract, dated 18 November 1653 by Thomason, received an anonymous *Answer* (1654) and was put first by Fox among the scores of attacks on Friends which he answered in *The Great Mystery*. For Richard Waller, see *Early Quaker Letters from the Swarthmore MSS. to 1660* (typescript; copies at Friends House and Woodbrooke), ed. G.F. Nuttall, 74.
- ³⁴ For more of Fox's letter, see *Welsh Saints*, 56-7.
- ³⁵ Llwyd acknowledges that his correspondent's expressions 'are rough hewen'. In his preface to Fox's *Journal* (1694) William Penn similarly acknowledges that, while 'his very Presence exprest a Religious Majesty', sentences would fall from Fox 'abruptly and broken'. For 'stood long in the gap ... a stake in the hedge', see Ezek. xxii. 30, a verse also dear to Penn: 'We are the People above all others, that must stand in the Gap' (*To the Children of Light* (1678), 3).