

SOME UNPUBLISHED

QUAKER TRACTS

(MARGARET EVERARD, fl. 1699-1704)

Margaret Everard is a somewhat shadowy figure in the annals of early Friends. We can find no record of her marriage to John Everard, nor an entry for her death in the registers of burials. The only possible reference to her, as the wife of John Everard, is in the births digest of Cambridge & Huntingdon Quarterly Meeting, where the birth, on eighth of the third month [May] 1693, is recorded of Ann Everard, daughter of John and Margaret. The child was born at (St) Ives, but the parents residence is given as Cotton, Suffolk. The supplement to the burials register records the death of Anne Everit, aged 'abt. 1yr', on the thirty-first of the fifth month [July] 1694, at Ives. The names and residence of the parents are the same as in the births register. There is no mention of Margaret in the records of the London & Middlesex meetings, and the records of Huntingdon Monthly Meeting do not survive for the period that the Everards were active. The village of Cotton, in Suffolk, is five miles north of Stowmarket. There is no record of a meeting of Friends there; the nearest meeting would probably be Mendlesham which, from 1667 to 1793, was within the compass of Bury Monthly Meeting. The records of Bury Monthly Meeting do not survive for this period, so it is impossible to confirm or deny that the parents of Ann Everard were, in fact, the same John and Margaret to whom this article refers.

It seems clear that Margaret Everard was well-known to Friends, not only as the wife of a minister, but also as an adherent of George Keith. John Everard, who was born in Patham Mary Magdalen, Norfolk, was convinced by Richard Hubberthorne and a minister by the time he was 20, about 1665. His testimony makes no mention of his marriage, and no record of it can be found in the digest registers for Norfolk & Norwich Quarterly Meeting, or London & Middlesex Quarterly Meeting. However, John Tomkins, in a letter written in London, 4th of 4th month [June], 1700, tells Sir John Rodes in Chesterfield '...even in Huntingdonshire that G.K. [George Keith] boasts of the great Conversion, J. Everad says, but 4 who was in unity with ffrds, who have gone to Steeplehouse, his wife and R.B. [Robert Bridgman] two of them.'¹ In a previous letter, dated London, 18th of 9th month [November], 1698, John Tomkins states that '...poor Marget Everad was

to much perswaded into an Indulgence towards G.K. insomuch that she is hurt by him, but not so much but there is good hope of her Recovery.’² From these references we can probably infer that Margaret Everard, if not born a Friend, was convinced, and married a leading minister, only to be drawn away by the preaching of George Keith.

Margaret’s only claim to fame is her published tract *An Epistle of Margaret Everard to the people called Quakers...*³ Published in 1699 this is a defence of her behaviour in following the teachings of George Keith, after his disownment by London Yearly Meeting in 1695, not so much for his doctrine as for his behaviour with regard to Friends in Pennsylvania.⁴

However, after Keith had entered the Established Church, she seems to have become disillusioned with his teaching, and almost a virulent opponent. Two unpublished tracts, apparently signed by Margaret Everard, have recently come to light in the manuscript collections in the Library at Friends House.⁵ There are two copies of each, clearly made to be circulated to members of the Society of Friends. One is an effort to dissociate Margaret from the actions of George Keith, and an affirmation of her acceptance of the tenets of Friends. The other is a personal appeal from Margaret to George Keith to change his ways and rejoin the Society.

These tracts are now transcribed below, examples of fine rhetoric in defence of the principles and beliefs of early Friends.

Although the Keithian controversy caused a major split in the Society of Friends little work has been done on the supporters of the protagonists in the dispute. It is hoped that this will be the first of several articles on the background of those involved.

TRACT 1

Dated ye 24th of the 6th mo 1704 London

Dear Friends -

As I have caused the Truth to be Evill spoken of by my backsliding, and have done the people of God much hurt thereby so I am Constrained from an Inward Conviction of spirit to make this my Publick Confession and lett the world know that for the same I have often mourned in secret and repented before the Lord that I was led astray and prevailed upon by ye specious pretences of more sound Doctrine to take part with men of corrupt minds against the sufficiency of ye divine light of Christ ye True light that lightneth every man that cometh into ye world and against my dearest friends whom I loved as my own life to set stumbling blocks in ye way of ye weak and to follow the shallow grose and carnall apprehensions of those men who are for the Generallity of them no more than Naturall men, and want ye inner life and power of Religion therefore that which hath wounded my soul & pearced mee more deeply has been my

Compliance with men of violence contention and envious spirits, whose Ears hath been swift to hear Evill of a people more Righteous then themselves, what I did in this matter was not for any by or sinister End, but more from a mistake in Judgment then any design I had to carry on, yea none knows but God alone my sorrow in that day, and though I have been for a time as a sheep straid from my Heavenly Fathers fold, yet I feel there is a turning in my soul again to ye flock of his companions, and an earnest cry begotten in me that I may yett travill for those that hath in any measure sustained hurt by my turning aside, which I hope will be a land mark to prevent others running aground, for I shall Rejoyce more in their safety then blush at my own Repentance it being abundance less shame to Confess then to Commit an error, let not any say that ye crosses of ye world or any other doscontent hath thrust out a glozeing & fained recantation, but know its not ye Praise of men I seek after, not their persecutions I flee from, I bless God I can expose my selfe to all ye Harsh Censures of men, only from ye pure minded & upright in heart I beg assistance at ye Throne of Grace and an Interest in their Prayers and as they find mee so to Receive mee

M.E.

And Friends, whereas I have writte a paper, some few thoughts on ye Benefits of Christ's outward Death and Suffering for my own private meditations wch. G.K. happened to see very much urged ye Publishing that paper, for it was not my designe as there mentioned to have it sent abroad in Publick, & though I did at Last Comply thereto yett it was not without Much Reluctoncy and unwillingness believing I should thereby suffer for it as I have since sufficiently done and must acknowledg and confess that what I then writt was very weak & shallow. But there was some truth in ye foregoing Paper but no where Sufficiently Expressed but to pass by as to ye Doctrinall part at present, and to doe my Friends Right whom I have Represented as Short in those weighty matters I have written what follows & do in ye humillity of my soul desire their forgiveness in anything wherein I have Injured them, Either by word or writing and perticularly for reflecting on ffrriends in ye Ministry who because of ye mistakes of some perticular persons hath been branded with Heresy Error & falsehood to ye world that thereby their work & service for ye truth might be less regarded & their ministry not take that good effect upon ye hearts of ye people as otherwise it would, and as to ye Doctrine of faith in Christ Crucified, In all that is necessary to salvation; upon long Consideration and sound Judgment I freely confess the People of God Called Quakers more truly believe and walk answerably thereto, then those that make a great outcry and noise about it, though many sincere souls amongst them cannot make such nice speculate Distinctions as many of ye Letter Learned can, yet can testifie by their own Experience that Christ is ye vine and they are the Branches by ye Sap and Nourishment they daily feel to flow from him.

TRACT 2

The 8th mo. 1704

G.K.

I have given my self the trouble once more for all to lett ye understand that I am now going to the people called Quakers, having clearly seen in the divine light of

God's spirit, that many grand points of doctrine with which they were charged by the Adversarys as false to be much more true and sound then I did believe, or that thou Represented to mee & therefore am fully satisfied and fixed in my Resolutions of fixing with them as formerly, and therefore advise thee not to speake word more after this time, to mee in any Respect (Except thou repent) for I am Resolved never to speak word to thee after this time and shall take the Liberty since it hath been my hard lot to be a sufferer by thee to deal plainly with thee as an Enemy and the worst that ever I mett with, but in Love to thy soul I cannot but call upon thee, to Returne from whence thou art fallen and repent Ere it be too late before the things belonging to thy peace be wholly hid from thine Eyes, but if thou wilt goe on in thy Stifneckedness, and goe on in thy gainsaying and Rebellion, I shall be clear, for by the assistance of God's Grace I am Resolved to be plaine, I and mine have cause to wish wee had never seen thee, as also some more may whose inward tents or habitations have been Ruined and destroyed by thee, but some I hope that are not too far gone, will in Gods due time come to see thee as I doe, to be a deceiver and a devouring woolf in sheeps cloathing one that hath first Ravened from the life and power of God in thy owne heart, and then Lucifer like, drawn others after thee, yett I believe not so many as thou makes a noyse of, I heard thou should say, thou brought over fifty to thee in Huntington shire, but that is like ye rest, I do really believe 8 or so is the most, and hardly so many that was Reale Friends, Oh the Misery of all is, that it was my hard case, and my Childrens to be deceived, made a prey of, and led from God, to feed upon husks, shaddows without substance, and notion without life, oh George, wilt thou goe on deceiving and being deceived, it is sad to backslide from the truth, but far worse to abide and continue therein, but more terrible then all, to sin against Light, I fear it's Interest, the fleece, and not the flock thou seeks after, Oh for shame Repent and turne from the Evill of thy wayes, for thy sun is near setting thy moon is in the waine, and the Evening of thy day hastens on apace, and thou art near the dawne of Eternity, then woe from God to thee --- better thou had never been born, Oh come into the spirit of love (if thou can) before it be too late, if not: dwell in the wrath, if thou like it so well, I must confess, I believe it is in that principle thou dwellest most, out of which thy Malice and Envy proceeds, from ye Bottomless Pitt of darkness, and thither both thou and thy works must goe at last for an Eternall Lodging, and abide, Except thou Repent woth speed, and had I gone on a little longer (for ought I know) it might have been my Portion too, but Blessed be my Compassionate God that hath opened mine Eyes, to see the Devill and his Instruments and thee to be one of ye subtlest, Lucifer was an Angell of Light or Son of the morning, and thou was once counted a Child of Light but whether it was so or no thou art far Enough from it now, well I have done with thee and all such as thou art, Yet before thou goe take this along with thee, thou Subtilest of Satan's Brood, how did thou beguile Mec and mine, by thy Crafty Insinuations, and specious pretences of more sounder Doctrine (To witt) of Salvation by Christ, Whereas thy Knowledge thereof is Carnall and outward, and but little if any of the true life and power of Religeon, so that had I Kept to the light within, then had I seen what it were thou aimed at, but it was otherwayes suffered for a great tryall to come upon mee, That so I might see my owne weakness, and the wiles of Satan, and truly I cannot forget the fear and dread that fell upon mee and seized my soul when I first became acquainted with thee, a very sad Omen of what followed after, thou knew what complaint I made to thee, that I was then in persute of, was

not according to the will of God, my fears were many, and sorrows began to multiply upon mee, then I Run to thee whom I may truely say proved but a blind Guide to mee, to lead mee the further out of the way, Oh the sad moan in a great deale of soul melting sorrow, I told thee I was afraid it would lead too much outward I should loose thereby the sence of the inward life and that I could not part with life in mee, but must waite dayly for it, and I told thee I did believe God to be Essentially and Substantially to dwell in man and thou subtilly answered, thou was of the same mind, that thou waited for it every day to strengthen, suppor and comfort thee, and wert further Encouraging mee to speak in Meetings where thee was, when as it was like to mee as with them of old, who required an Hebrew song, I was Entring into a Strang Land, and thereupon could not, I answered thee that the path thou led mee in Carried me from it, and yet thou subtilly bad mee doe it, now I know Infallably thy Principles carried me from it, and that thou Philistine like put out mine Eyes, and made mee grinde at thy mill, oh how sorrowfull was I at that day, the bitter complaint that I made then to thee (a Phisician of no value) my soul hath still in Remembrance and under the sad consequence my soul mourns bitterly to this day, that I should forsake God, the living fountaine in my soul to look to Christ without, thou thyself could not tell where, only in Heaven but in what part thou knew not nor where to Direct my mind to the Object of faith and well after all I came to a sort of a rest and peace at times, but it was a false rest and peace, it had as the signes of a wrong peace attending it, for it was never long without Doubts so that I often made my moan to men better then thy self, as they may remember the many heart breakings for fear I was wrong, and if Right how was I cast down in the sence of some I had led out of the way, so that the sorrows I have gone through no tongue can Express, Miserable Comforters were yee all, you Cry peace, peace, but not that which God speaks to his people, Oh how hott and passionate was I against my friends, and against their Principles, I must Confess I have been unsettled, and complained to many, Insomuch some have thought I would goe back again, some Reported I was madd, but some of the Ministers were very tender of mee, for which I pray God reward them, but some againe to my certain knowledge said that if I went from the Church it would be because the Ministers did not settle upon mee an Estate as upon thee and some others, but this is all false they would have given, and done more then I was willing to Receive, that some (if occasion require) can testifie, well I thank them for their love and tenderness to mee and mine, and now I must tell thee it is no such thing that I seek. I need not any thing from any I have enough food and Raiment, and content with Godliness is to mee greater gaine then all the treasures of this world, but as Certainly as the serpent beguiled Eve under the same specious pretences, did thou beguile mee, your Golden Baite of greater life and salvation then ever I knew, was that whereby I was ensnared, and led astray, for had thou told mee what the consequence would have been, and that thou would have turned at last to be a dead lifeless Envious formall Preist, and continued a persecuter to thy lifes end, thou should have gone for mee, It was the worst dayes worke that Ever the Church made to Espouse gratifie and encourage thy proud, Envious, Conceited minde, to tell thee plainly I never heard any of the Church of England, or any other party as I Remember like thee in the Pulpit, I have heard some other of thy friends say, they had Rather hear any body then thou, and I belive thee to be one of the worst, Ah poor man thou thinks thy Selfe a great man, but I must tell thee thou art a dismall Preacher, in comparison of some I

know, and as for Religion, Piety, and Charity, thou art not worthy to Stoop downe and Untye their Shoes, nor indeed I never knew any Church minister as thou art to Compare with, oh George Set thy own house in order before thou Endeavorest to Rectifie others, I mean both inward and outward, and consider with mee what hath been the Effects of our going out from God in our selves, how pride Envye lightness deriding hypocrisie lying Slandering and the Like abound in and amongst many of the few thou brags of, I see not where I come it so abound as in thy own family, I must confess what I have Seen in thy family gave mee a Clearer sight of the Effects of thy turning from the Inward to the outward, then any thing else I know, some more have seen it and complained of it to mee, But it's thought it will not be allwayes day with thee, but that thou mayest yett come back, and thy Pride come downe, God in his Mercy bring thee downe in a true sence, from one that wisheth thee well and pittys thy blindness, better (in the state thou art in) then thou thy self can M. Everard.

Rosamund Cummings.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ S.F. Locker Lampson: *A Quaker Post-Bag*, London 1910, 163-64.
- ² *Ibid*, 145.
- ³ Library of the Religious Society of Friends London, Tract Vol. 35/11.
- ⁴ Charles P. Keith; *Chronicles of Pennsylvania*, ([1917], Freeport NY, 1969), I, 235, 'G. Keith disowned by London Yearly Meeting 1695, 'not for doctrine but for his unbearable temper and carriage'. For a fuller discussion of the Keithian Controversy, see E.W. Kirby; *George Keith, (1638-1716)*, New York 1942, and J. William Frost; *The Keithian Controversy in Early Pennsylvania*, Norwood, Pa., 1980. Also *JFHS*, 57, 1, 21-32.
- ⁵ Library of the Religious Society of Friends, Temp Mss 918/1-4.