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Letters of Hilary Prach and John G.
Matern

THE following letters have been extracted and translated by Edward Bernstein, a London Friend, from *Unschuldige Nachrichten von Alten und Neuen Theologischen Sachen*, published at Leipzig, vol. for the year 1706, 8th section, pp. 432-446.

The letters are printed here in the hope that some of our readers may be able to throw additional light upon the spread of early Quakerism on the continent of Europe and upon the lives of persons mentioned in the letters.

TO MY BELOVED FRIEND MARTIN JOHN AT
LAUBGRUND

First of all, friendly greetings! Beloved friend Martin John. This is for the sake of an enclosure and as a proof of my being alive, though I have been regarded as dead. I can readily believe that the one who invented the news of my being dead and spread it abroad, as well as the circumstances in which I found myself in London during the year, did so on the ground of my not having written, and so it was felt that I did not find the case of the Quakers concerning their Principia and conversation quite so satisfactory as, at first, I thought them to be from their writings, and that

possibly I have regretted both the journey and the public avowal ; or, if this be not so, that, perhaps, I have endured among them great need and privation regarding the temporal means of support.

But, oh, dear people ! How different everything is, how much better both with regard to them and to all of us than you can think ! I give thanks to God both on behalf of myself and of my family, and they do likewise, that He has led us so wonderfully, and brought us amongst this despised people.

In order that thou might have some knowledge of my temporal subsistence I declare that for over a year and a quarter I have been occupied at the Friends' Printing house with the correctur of books published by them, getting for it £10 a year, i.e., 44 Thalers. I make also Hornbecks school books for children attending school. Occasionally I translate calvinistic and Hollandish writings into the High German language.

Recently, I had also to put from German into English Sebastian Franckens book of The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in order that the Friends might have it to read, because it agrees with their position.

My wife and daughter Mariana are engaged in silk-weaving, and thus we earn extra a fair yearly amount. Besides that we have from the Friends the rent of the house viz. £3 a year ; as well as coal free—which is used here as fuel in the place of wood. For this purpose certain well-to-do Friends contribute, and this year have given me £10 as an aid towards a better livelihood.

My son Ephraim who had board and school^r for two whole years with Hans Georgen at Waltham Abbey was brought by the Friends to London and put by them to the bootmakers trade. He has tried now for three weeks if the work—(which I proposed to him, seeing that Jacob Böhm was a bootmaker, and George [Pop?] Fox, the leader amongst us Friends, whose mouth God opened and who was the first to institute the silent meetings or quiet gatherings, is such an one by a Divine vocation ; and, besides, various speakers and highly gifted men of God in our ministerio are boot-makers)— would suit him and he his master. Now if he

^r Hirten ?

should be accepted then the Friends are to pay for him the full apprentice-fee, viz. £10. (A widow from Amsterdam who was here during last summer gave £5 of it and the other £5 the Friends here gave.) According to the general custom which prevails among the handicrafts of London, he has to learn the work for seven years, and when that time is over he is to get from his master two new suits, as good as those which we have now to get for him. So, Ephraim, too, is provided for.

Mariana was enabled by Friends to attend a school for sewing for a whole year, and they paid for that.

Now from all this thou can tell whether we suffer any want in the necessary means of subsistence.

With regard to Hans Georgen, he has by means of his school—(though it is a hard task)—apart from good board for himself as well as free residence—at least £20 a year, so that he will be able to support his wife and his dear little daughter. But, in addition to that, he has for two years had such good practice in the work of an English school-master, so that if he should not wish to stay in the place any longer (where, however, he is both loved and esteemed, and thus will not be readily dimittiret), he could at any time start a school of his own among Friends in England, take in boarders and earn, with much less effort, a substantial amount per year. So no one is able to say that the Friends will send us back and not allow us to be amongst them.

Last summer Heinrich Zetke, a book-keeper of Amsterdam, or, Dantzic, was here in London for a few weeks. I let him have my double Extract from the writings of Jacob Boehmen,—Adam prior to the Fall, and Adam in and after the Fall—with the expectation that he would get it printed, and to send on only four or five copies of it. He promised to do so.

That there is a division among us on account of the writings of Jacob Boehmen, and that, therefore, some are known as Boehmists is a fearful falsehood. I do not know in the whole of London any single one among the Friends, of whom there are several thousand, who holds to the writings of Jacob Boehmen in preference to the writings of Friends, for which reason he might be named a Boehmist. The position is this. Very many friends had read the writ-

ings of Jacob Boehmen and were fond of them while they still belonged to the other sects, the papists (so the Men-nists are called here), the Independents; the Presbyterians; etc., and they became unsettled in their religion by their means; then they attended Quaker Meetings, or read their writings, and in that way were convinced of the Truth and became united with us. All such still acknowledge the gift of the Spirit in the writings of Jacob Boehmen, and hold him to be a divinely illumined man who prophesied in particular about a people which was to come from the North, but they no longer turned to his writings, nor did they ever point them out to anyone else, for they know from daily experience that a single Quaker Meeting, of the kind that is held as it should be, makes greater demands, and is of more use, than the reading for many years of writings which talk so much of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil can ever prove to be. How then can they give the occasion for anyone to call them Boehmists? Certainly he is not a Quaker who is a Boehmist. A Boehmist makes much of the outward water-baptism of infants and of the outward bread and wine as very essential means of salvation, but let anyone name a single individual Quaker in the whole of London who holds such things, and is not aware of something better with regard to both these points. In this respect the Boehmists are to be sought amongst the Papists who in a like fashion lay much stress on these shadowy things. There is none such to be found among the Quakers. In the fear of the Lord, and on the ground of Truth, I declare regarding myself that if I had never seen Jacob Boehmen's writings I should have been a Quaker many years before, while still nothing, or very little was known about him. To the extent that I followed the Weigelianish Sabbath (which I many times had done) I should have withdrawn into that *Sacro Silenzio* and midnight stillness of chastening grace, should have attended to the work of God in myself; should have felt after God; should have realised his presence; and through such waiting should have received new strength and empowerment. As soon, however, as I read the writings of Jacob Boehmen I was diverted by the high knowledge, forgot the *Unum Necessarium*, viz, the still Sabbath, in the fear of God to sit down at the feet of Jesus,

and to hear him, to practise more than I used to do with Weigel, and so to have an experience of the power of God. So then I was rather hindered by him in my good way, and was not led onward. Of this I became conscious first of all when God put into my hands the writings of Quakers (which I consider to be a great mercy) that brought me into the former true and only way which God had shown me in my youth through *Weigel*.

There is at present here in London *Quirinus Kuhlmann* of Breslau, a young learned man who defended *Jacob Boehmen* against the *Academicos* (regarding philosophy) in published writings. I have not been able so far to call on him. I learn from others, however, that he is now engaged with the letter of the Scriptures, and is planning a new version of the Bible in all languages so that it might never be lost or corrupted. He declares that he will write, shortly, three times seventy books; that two angels are daily appointed on his behalf; and other wonderful things, whereby he has forfeited the credit of many.

A few weeks ago the *Hertzog von Schultzbach* was in Holland and ordered that *Helmontius* who was formerly, for some time, a member of his council, should proceed from England to him in order to direct him to Quaker Meetings (which he on various occasions attended) at Amsterdam and Rotterdam; and there were then two speakers from England itself—one *Christoph Taylor* of *Waltham Abbey*, the master of *Hans Georgen* or *Rector Scholæ*,—who spoke in Meeting. At present *Helmontius* is again in this country, staying with a certain earl who is a member of Parliament. He often comes to London, and a fortnight ago he paid me a visit. Then again there is amongst us the royal counsellor of the government of *Sachsen-Lauenburg* (who was before a royal counsellor at *Schultzbach*), a highly esteemed person of eminence, who sold all that he had and retired amongst us here in our silent gatherings. But there are few German Friends amongst us: only a *Chimicus* of *Basel*; a student of *Thuringia*; a tailor of *Stetin* who married here; and a carpenter *David N. von Buntzlau* of *Silesia*, whose father was a member of the council there. He was brought up as a Catholic, but three years ago, after having attended the Quaker Meeting several times he was convinced, and he

joined our Society. Two years ago he married, and is getting on quite well.

Send the enclosed letter to Hans M., by a special post carrier to Nymtsch. We have transferred to him the entire rights of the house at G. and have ceded fifty Thalers when he secures payment. The paper does not suffer me to write more at present. My best friendly greetings to thyself and thy Ursula. God's blessings be with you.

London the 9th October (St. vet)² 1676.

H. P.

JOHANN GEORG MATERNS LETTER *AD EUNDEM*
IS AS FOLLOWS :

The spirit of love, J.C., unite and bind our souls in Divine Love so that we may have unceasingly Fellowship with God and with one another to the praise and glory of God !

Very dear friend, much loved with a brotherly heart, M. J. ! Thy loving letter of the 23 May 1676 which reached Nürnberg the 26th of September, I received since Röger came here, and answered everything,—excepting the one on *Jubilate*, which Joh. Claus sent on to me, which so far has remained unanswered, because I translated thy letter in English and greatly wished that the same might be sent on to Röger who himself might send thee an answer, and himself might explain with regard to the things he told us about you. While he has been travelling in Ireland, however, and Friends knew not in what place he was to be met, this has so far been postponed, and that has delayed the answer. Do not entertain wrong thoughts of us or of our teaching, but rest assured in God who tries our hearts and reins that our love is true, faithful and constant towards thee and towards all those who love God in their heart, and who follow Him, through a new birth, in the power of this Divine Love. Thou hast recognised my sincerity and I thine. Hence our hearts are firmly bound to one another in a steadfast love, and, therefore, I am often mindful of thee and sigh in my spirit unto God on thy behalf, that the work of Grace in the restoring of the Divine Image, which he began in us by His Holy Spirit might also be perfected. For it is the work of God alone, and the power of God through the Holy Spirit that can

² That is, " Old Style."

transform us into the Divine likeness,—that can and must make us into new men. Therefore it is right that we should be yielded up and surrendered unto Him, in order that we might be led and ruled by God, and be confident in spirit that He will not leave us nor forsake us, but will perfect His work in us, and will reveal to us His will in His Light, and will enable us by His power, always to choose the good and do it and not that which is sinful to which Satan provokes us so that we are to hate it and shun it, in order that in quietness towards God and by His Spirit our salvation might be accomplished. Thus turning aside from all men, *from all men* to God, our soul turned within us in a saving stillness, we find and feel Him working, quickening and drawing our spirits unto Him by His love, so it is that we may make our boast and say, God is God, and very great in Love.

I wrote last time to you about the 12th of April, and have enclosed in it a letter to my father in Nymtsch. In it we gave him full power over the house at N. Thou will get the same letters, and, according to request, have them forwarded by a special messenger. May I ask, please, that similarly this one might be sent on by a special messenger so that he might get the letter. I wrote to father that he might inform thee of some place in Breslau to which thou might send my letters so that he should not have to pay so much for the post carrier. Take and sell the bed you have so that thou might have the money for the post carrier. In the same way I wrote to Chr. Reder with regard to the books to sell them, as he could, so that he might be able to help thee in respect of payment for the post carrier. If this is not enough, thou must let me know and have payment by return.

Give the loving greetings from myself; my wife, my parents-in-law and children; to thy beloved Ursula, G. Haupt, Kriebel, Hn. Meyer and other worthy friends. I often think of you and sigh unto God on your behalf, that you might grow more and more in His love and in the Knowledge of Him.

I wonder who it is that writes such lies unto you that my father-in-law has died, and that a baby-boy has been born to us. Neither is true. Indeed, God has blessed us in our married life and granted us a baby girl who was

born on the 14th of May and has been named Hanna. But when thou wrote thy letter no one knew of this.

With hearty greetings and commending thee to the Grace of God, from

J. G. M.

30th Sept. 1676.

The writer in the *Unschuldige Nachrichten* adds :

Our evangelical church will not lightly regard—for which Most High God should be heartily praised—such a greivous example of a shameful falling away as that of Hilarius Prach, the pastor and preacher of Goldberg, who is thoroughly versed in Oriental languages and other studies, who himself of his own accord gave up his charge at Diesdorff which he held for ten years, and on the 4th June 1674 he, with his whole family, together with his son-in-law Johann George Matern, *minist. candid.* and teacher at Goldberg went to England and joined the Quakers. On another occasion we shall say more about him, meanwhile the *Nova Lit. Germaniæ*, A. 1705, p. 290 :—Leifmanum de Fanaticis Siles : §20 D.3.—might be consulted regarding him. In this case we wish to contribute two letters which he and his son-in-law sent to a physician of Schwenckfeld who has again and again become well known for his treatment, and who wrote at Schwenckfeld some books under the name of Matthæus Israel. Both have to do with private affairs, yet at the same time contain all kinds of remarkable passages which are not without use in the present struggle with fanatical souls. We have given them in full here and we think them worthy of perusal. We wish with all our heart that in the example of this unfortunate scholar, perverted too—whose knowledge has been highly esteemed by such celebrated individuals as Geier : Acoluth : Wagenfeil : and Mehlfürer himself—those souls inclined towards similar unhappy mistakes might see themselves reflected and might learn more truly their eternal salvation. How far the account of his position and other details of the letter are to be believed will be explained fully by some remarks in another place where he is fittingly to be set alongside the Silesian preachers ; —being particularly a sad memorial of the fact that the reading of the writings of Boehmen,

Weigel and other fanatics cause mischief and harm, and reveal the great abominations of such people and make clear their differences.

The following paragraphs are taken from the *Nova Litteraria Germaniæ*, August, 1705. Hamburg (above referred to) :

HILARY PRACHE : Anno 1674, 4th June, Hilarius Prache with all his family and belongings together with his son-in-law George Matern, the teacher at the gymnasium, went from here to Holland and England to his fellow-believers the fanatics, since he had much to do with the offences of the Schwenckfeldians in the neighbourhood, and through their request he was taken from here and brought to Hamburg. Finally according to his own letters written to this place he was in London taking part at the silent Meeting of the Quakers, etc. (page 291).

Vir certe doctissimus & linguae imprimis sanctae eleganter peritus, sed fanaticus Schwenckfeldianus, Quackerus, & Boehmista, Publicavit tractatum³ :

1. R. Jud. Happenini. Bakshah.⁴ Lipsiae 1662.
2. Librum Rbb. Nishmath Adam⁵
3. Librum B'hibath o'lam⁶

Pater ipsius fuit Michael Prachius, pastor in pago Tenschel, Theologus & Historicus qui edidit Orationem Historicam de Goldberga typis exscriptam Ienae. 1597.⁷
(page 290)

[In connection with the above R. M. Jones's work—*Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*—may be helpfully consulted.]

³ "A man truly of the highest learning and particularly of choice skill in] holy speech, but a fanatic, a Schwenckfeldian, a Quaker, and a Boehmist, He published the tract (Leipzig 1662):"

⁴ "The Enquiry" respecting Rabbi Judah Happenini.

⁵ The Rabbinical Book, "The Soul of Adam."

⁶ The Book of the "World to Come."

⁷ "His father was Michael Prachius, a pastor in the district of Tenschel, a theologian, and historian who put forth 'Orationem Historicam de Goldberga,' printed at Jena 1597."