

Isaac Blackbeard and his "Book of Three Leaves," 1783

OF Isaac Blackbeard (1712-1788), of Whitby, little is known, but that little (according to the Preparative Meeting records) is good. He appears to have been trusted by both parties in Whitby Meeting, and also at Scarborough, during the armed vessel controversy towards the end of the eighteenth century, and acted as a go-between. For many years he was an Elder, perhaps one of the first to be appointed. His trade was that of a barber and his shop was in Church Street, near the Market Cross.

In 1743, Blackbeard married Lucy Kirk (c. 1710-1786). They had four sons—Jacob (1744-1745), Jacob (1745/6-), Abraham (1748-1752), and John (1751-1753). Isaac's brother, Michael, was clerk of the parish church for forty years—a longer period than any other occupier of the position.

This information, worked out by Joseph T. Sewell, of Whitby, adds greatly to our hitherto scanty knowledge of this interesting person. Joseph Smith's *Catalogue* reference to him runs :

'Query, whether a Friend? He is supposed to have been a reader of *Jacob Behmen's* Works. Perhaps a simple, well-meaning individual, though under the name of a Quaker [!]

This was taken from a statement, written by Morris Birkbeck, early in the nineteenth century, on the copy of Blackbeard's tract in **D.** :

Not with approbation of Friends, by a simple, perhaps well-meaning, Behmenite, though under the name of a Quaker.

The pamphlet by which, principally, Blackbeard is known, is entitled *Man's Own Book of Three Leaves*, by Isaac Blackbeard. Whitby: printed by C[aleb] Webster on the Crag. M,DCC, LXXXIII. M. Birkbeck has pencilled at the head: "of Robert Webster, Whitby"

(presumably the donor of the tract). It consists of twenty-eight octavo pages. The opening paragraph is this :

There is nothing more profitable for man in his toilsome travel and pilgrimage through this vale of misery, of crosses, tribulations and various exercises, than to seek and find himself, and understand and know that he is not at home in this outward life ; therefore, it is of absolute necessity to learn to read in his own book, the book of all books, which man himself is.

Then follows :

This book contains three leaves, which are the mystery of the three worlds one in another.

The first is the dark world, which is called Hell, or the kingdom of wrath and fierceness manifested and known in the fall of the creature, which before was secret and hidden as the night is hidden in the day.

The second is the light world or the kingdom of Heaven, in which all the intelligent creatures were created by God, the only good, for a purpose of his own glory, and their everlasting happiness.

The third is the outward, visible world, wherein we now live, which is only a shadowy representation of the two inward worlds of darkness and of light, good and evil, a mixture of both in and without man, who is the highest and noblest part of the outward creation, consisting in animals, vegetables and minerals, in their wonderful varieties and different qualities, as is found out and seen by the wise and expert searchers in nature, plainly and manifestly declaring the glory of God, and is the contents of whatever has been written or preached by man since the fall to this present time, and will be to the end of this transitory world.

A curious sub-division of this treatise is that of " each leaf of man's book " into four chapters. Much is said of the Garden of Eden and man's fall. The author says in his concluding paragraph :

Thus man will be judged out of his own book, and what is written therein, or what principle is found predominant in him, there is his home, and that in its eternity ; for the eternal fire will make a just and equal SEPARATION. . . The right hand is the principle of LIGHT, LIFE and LOVE ; the left hand is the principle of DARKNESS, DEATH and WRATH.

Joseph T. Sewell has made an abstract of this tract ; of which Rufus M. Jones writes :

I have read the MS with great interest indeed. It is every way a valuable document. It is perfectly evident to my mind that this good Friend has been reading Jacob Boehme. The whole structure of his thought seems to me to be built on Boehme's view of the Light and the Dark in the world.