

“The Desecrated Quaker Maidens”

TO what extent did early Quakerism influence the religious life of the continent of Europe, especially in its eastern portion? Scattered over Quaker literature of ancient and modern date there are numerous facts and many suppositions, but so far the subject has not received adequate treatment. The letters printed on the first few pages of this volume of THE JOURNAL, and notes to the letters to be printed later, shed additional light, and the recent translation work of Edward Bernstein, supported by the Friends' “Continental Committee,” will yield valuable results.

Through the efforts of Charles E. Gillett, of Worcester, a pamphlet has been printed entitled *Russian Maidens who suffered as Quakers; a chapter in the religious history of Russia in the early eighteenth century*. (London: Headley Brothers, pp. 48. 2s.) It is a translation by E. Bernstein of an article by V. V. Gur'ev, a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, which appeared in August, 1881, in a Russian paper of conservative and anti-foreign tendency.

In the ancient town of Tomsk in Siberia there was a female monastery occupied in 1712 by thirty-three nuns, the youngest being forty-nine years old. According to some, these were “crafty, intriguing old women, propagating various dissenting errors,” while others looked upon them as “honest, devout, godly old women,” and as to their history nothing certain was known.

But modern investigators have been fortunate in discovering ancient documents which shed light upon the circumstances which brought these ancient dames into the place they occupied.

In order to crush the heresy of departure from Russian orthodoxy which showed itself in Moscow in 1733, the leaders and teachers of the Raskolniki or dissenters were punished with death and many others banished to Siberia. Among the latter were some women who were sent to a monastery at Tomsk into close confinement. For a few years dissent seemed to have been overlooked and the banished “maidens” probably returned home to Moscow—but in the years 1744-1745 the Raskolniki again raised their heads and another official enquiry was set on foot. No name appears to have been given to the 1733—1734 uprising, but that of 1744—1745 is officially described as “the Quaker Heresy,” and the women, who were again banished to Tomsk, became known as the “degraded” or “desecrated Quaker maidens”—the description “desecrated” indicating that the women had belonged previously to the monastic vocation.

But why the name *Quaker* heresy? Had the movement been begun or encouraged by Quakers from the west? or was it merely a title without historical background? and of what sort of people were the adherents to the sect so called?

M. Gur'ev says that the leaders of the sect held "blasphemous meetings" and indulged in "abominable practices" and permitted "all unnatural forms of incest." He comes to the conclusion that "the sect which was named in the forties of last century as 'The Quaker Heresy,' received that title not in virtue of the nature of the case nor in virtue of any resemblance to, or of any union with, foreign quakerism, but deliberately on account of some special reason, for there was a particular object in view." This special reason is indicated in the remaining section of this pamphlet.

To follow the author would be to doubt the possibility of any extra-national influence, but further light may modify or falsify the conclusions of M. Gur'ev.

R. J. Campbell and Quakerism

"Take any place of worship, Anglican or Nonconformist, wherein the sacramental idea finds no place, and—I say it with all respect—the peculiar quality of Catholic saintship at its best, that sweet, calm, lowly confidence with a touch of awe therein, that exalted serenity which it always exhibits, will be missing. It may be pointed out that the members of the Society of Friends are characterised thereby. That is not quite the case. They have their own special excellence, but it is not just that. And I have often thought that the Society of Friends, which professes to be the least sacramental of all Nonconformist bodies, is in reality more sacramental in its susceptibilities than any of them. All the Quakers I have ever known have illustrated this. Their habit of stillness, listening and expectant, renders them sensitively responsive to all higher influences, through whatsoever media they may come. Readers of Whittier's poetry cannot fail to note this. And the Rev. Canon Hopher in his *Fruits of Silence* supplies an interesting testimony to the same effect."

[*A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, by the Rev. R. J. Campbell, p. 63. London, 1917.]

"I have to thank Dean Inge, too, for putting me on the track of dear Mother Julian, of Norwich¹, whose *Revelations of Divine Love* are a scheme of philosophy as well as an exceedingly beautiful type of spiritual testimony, though doubtless the last thing in the mind of the devout anchoress was to do any philosophising. Richard Rolle² and George Fox come a long way second in my estimation. Jacob Behmen I found difficult and involved, but full of beauty and suggestiveness when I could understand him. But it was always Catholic saintship that spoke most directly to my heart."

[*Ibid.* p. 108.]

¹ Juliana (1343-1443), Norwich anchoress; author of "xvi. Revelations of Divine Love" (first printed 1670; ed. H. Collins, 1877) (*D.N.B.*).

² See Jones, *Mystical Religion*, p. 334.