

## Notes on a "Compendious View of Genuine Christianity," 1799

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Those who have read *William Law and Eighteenth Century Quakerism*<sup>1</sup> will remember that the revered author of *The Serious Call* was first brought into touch with Friends (in 1736) through a correspondence with a certain young Anglican, Fanny Henshaw by name, in which he vainly sought to dissuade her from joining the Society. Fanny Henshaw was recognised in 1737, soon after her admittance, as a Minister and, marrying twice, became later on, first as Frances Paxton and then as Frances Dodshon, well-known through her ministry in many parts of England during the course of a long life, which closed in 1793.

We have no direct evidence of what Frances Dodshon thought of William Law and his writings, after that author's conversion to a mystical standpoint had led him to teach for the last twenty years of his life a form of Christianity very closely akin to Quakerism. But the fact that she gave the title of *A Serious Call . . . to Sinners in Zion* to a little eight-page tract, her only publication, which she caused to be printed in 1744 seems to indicate her esteem for him.

And now there has come to light a little volume of some fifty odd pages that has lain for many years in the library of the late Sir Edward Fry at Failand, near Bristol, which suggests further evidence of this esteem. It is entitled *A Compendious View of Genuine Christianity, chiefly extracted from an author of the last Century, and a much esteemed writer of the present; shewing the difference between the Primitive and Modern Christians, and the Causes thereof.*

The book was published in 1799, being "printed and sold" by J. Mills of Bristol and Darton and Harvey, London, the same two booksellers whose names appear in 1803 on a little memoir of Frances Dodshon's conversion and life. The extracts from the anonymous seventeenth century author (whom I am unable to identify) aim at exhorting Christians to bring their whole life into submission to the Spirit of Christ rather than merely to conform to some creed or sect. The "much esteemed writer of the present Century," though his name also is not given, is clearly William Law. The two long extracts included are much abbreviated versions of the fifth and sixth of Law's letters to enquirers, as they appear in the *Collection of Letters*, which was published by two of his disciples shortly before his death in 1761. They are followed by a short passage from Law's beautiful *Spirit of Prayer* (Part I), and the whole contains the essence of his teaching to work and wait for the birth of the Divine Christ in our hearts and to do everything in obedience to His inward guidance.

<sup>1</sup> By Stephen Hobhouse (1927).

On the flyleaf of the booklet is written : " Wm. Storrs Fry's, the Gift of Saml. Dyer, 1805." Now we know (from the extracts from his diary given on p. 84 of vol. 26 (1929) of the Friends Historical Society *Journal*) that Samuel Dyer was an intimate friend of Frances Dodshon, *alias* Fanny Henshaw. For some time the latter was living in Bristol, and Samuel Dyer notes her presence and ministry there on various occasions between the years 1766 and 1773. And in 1793 he records that he " heard of the decease of my old friend and valuable acquaintance, Frances Dodshon, whose memory is sweet."

It is therefore an attractive and not unlikely supposition, that in her old age William Law's refractory correspondent drew spiritual nourishment from his mystical writings, and that from her her friend Samuel Dyer learnt to love them also, and to introduce them to his friends.

A contributory cause was doubtless the fact that Thomas Mills, the well-known Bristol bookseller (and publisher), whose son and successor, J. Mills, published and sold the little book bought by Samuel Dyer, was a lover of the writings of the great German mystic, Jacob Boehme (*anglicè* Behmen), whose disciple and interpreter William Law was. Thomas Mills was a remarkable man, who was admitted to the Society of Friends in 1778, and disowned in 1789 (apparently for some slight financial irregularities). But he continued thereafter to attend meeting and to use the Quaker language and dress. He was widely known among West Country evangelicals and Quakers and published extracts from " quietist " writers such as Fénelon and Madame Guyon. His daughter, Selina, married the anti-slavery pioneer, Zachary Macaulay, in 1799, and so became the mother of the historian, Thomas Babington Macaulay. In Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay*, we are informed that " his grandchildren remembered him as an old man of imposing appearance, with long white hair, talking incessantly of Jacob Behmen." It would be of interest to discover if any portions of the correspondence or manuscripts of this Thomas Mills still survive.

It may be added that William Storrs Fry, to whom the book now in question was given, resided in Whitechapel and lived from 1736 to 1808, being a younger brother of Joseph Fry of Bristol, who was great-grandfather of the late Sir Edward Fry, to whom it descended.<sup>2</sup> W. S. Fry was also the father of Joseph Fry, who married Elizabeth Gurney, the prison reformer.

Frances Dodshon (Henshaw) had evidently been in some relationship with the Fry family, for there exists a MS. appeal, dated 1766, from the Bristol Women's Meeting, and signed by her, Lydia Pocock and Hannah Fry, in which these three Friends plead for more diligence in attending the periodic gatherings of the Society, " as you tender [i.e. hold dear] the welfare of the Society in general and the poor in particular."

STEPHEN HOBHOUSE.

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" Nature forces on our hearts a Creator ; history, a Providence."  
JEAN PAUL.

<sup>2</sup> The book is now in D.