

Willem Sewel of Amsterdam, 1653-1720

William I. Hull, Ph.D., F.R.Hist.S., Howard M. Jenkins Research Professor of Quaker History at Swarthmore College, U.S.A., has published as Number One of the College Monographs on Quaker History, a biography of William Sewel, "the first Quaker Historian of Quakerism".¹ The writer of this review was fortunate in having a copy of the book with him on a recent visit to the Friends meeting at Amsterdam, a meeting which would have rejoiced the heart of William Sewel, who laboured so earnestly for the Amsterdam meeting in its early days.

Dr. Hull's monograph fills a gap in Quaker bibliography. Many of us who knew Sewel's *History of Quakerism* had very little knowledge of the writer of it. Here we get into intimate touch with the man and his work. Sewel was a most industrious writer and translator. His work was his life and it remains with us to-day as a permanent record of the man. Besides writing his history of Quakerism and his dictionary, he translated a number of English Friends' books into Dutch. Dr. Hull gives a list of thirty-seven published works including a translation of Juvenal's thirteenth satire, and works of Robert Boyle, scientist, Gilbert Burnet, historian, William Congreve, poet, William Dampier, voyager. By correspondence with Friends in England (particularly with Isaac Penington, William Penn and Thomas Ellwood) and much reading of Quaker tracts and records, Sewel acquired a wide knowledge of the beginnings of the Quaker movement, both in England and on the continent. He was highly esteemed by Penn, who sought his help in connection with a Quaker school at Bristol. Sewel declined the offer of the post as headmaster, explaining that he was too much attached to his own country and meeting to move from Holland.

¹ Though less comprehensive, John Whiting's *Persecution Exposed*, 1715, has some claim to be an earlier Quaker history of Quakerism.

The idea of a Quaker History was stimulated in Sewel's mind by inquiries from the historian, Gerard Croese, in 1692, concerning the Quaker movement. George Fox appears to have supplied material to Croese and Sewel was consulted and gave Croese considerable assistance. But he was far from satisfied with the way Croese used the material. He was concerned for a right interpretation of the Quaker message, and though overwhelmed with translating work and the compiling of a Great Dictionary and grammar of the Dutch and English languages, he determined on becoming a historian himself. But it was twenty years before his *magnum opus* appeared.

Perhaps the most interesting chapter in Dr. Hull's book is that containing the correspondence that passed between Sewel and Theodor Eccleston, "as the Clerk of the Meeting for Sufferings in London",¹ concerning the publication of his history. The meeting took official cognizance of it, having pages of an English translation, made by the author, read at its sessions from time to time. This naturally led to discussion and those of us who know the Meeting for Sufferings to-day will not be surprised to read that there was divergence of view expressed on certain passages of Sewel's text. Eventually English Friends were satisfied and some financial help was given to the author.

Friends were not however prepared to sponsor and finance an English edition without amendment, and so it came to pass that the Dutch and English Histories differ, especially in the account of the James Nayler incident. The English edition did not appear till 1722, two years after the author's death. It is of historic interest that when Sewel's History came to be printed in America, Benjamin Franklin was engaged on the type-setting. Dr. Hull quotes a paragraph from Franklin's Autobiography in this connection.

A valuable record for the student of Quaker history, one regrets the omission of the second l in Ellwood so frequently throughout the book.

S. GRAVESON

¹ The authority for the statement that Eccleston held this office is not given.