

## Richardson MSS.

Further unpublished writings of George Fox

By HENRY J. CADBURY

**A**FTER consulting all, as I supposed, of the principal manuscript collections of the writings of George Fox, one of the most voluminous has just become available for examination and study. I had been aware that nearly half a century ago such a book was in existence through a reference to it in *The Friend* (Phila.), Vol. 61, p. 68, by J.W., probably Joseph Walton, the editor :

Before me lies an ancient MS. volume of Epistles mostly those of George Fox, written in a singularly clear, uniform and compact hand, probably by someone who was a scribe by profession. It contains 220 large folio pages.

Finally, though I had about despaired of finding the book, I published in the same periodical a letter of inquiry, which fortunately came to the attention of the present owners who have given me access to it. Following the precedent of this *Journal*, I may offer a brief description of it.

It is a folio volume, once a ledger but now filled with Quaker epistles written throughout in the same very even and legible hand. The original cover of parchment-covered pasteboard is still on the book, though evidently it was once re-bound or repaired and covered over with a home-made linen cover. The binding also was renewed, but a leaf from the back of both the first and the last quire has been lost, viz. pages 28 and 29 and 221 and 222.

The book is now the property of Edward Wanton Smith of Germantown, Pennsylvania, and of his sisters Anna Wharton Wood of Waltham and Esther Morton Smith of Washington, having come to them through their father Benjamin R. Smith and grandmother Esther Morton Smith. It evidently is an heirloom of long standing in the family, as it carries the inscriptions " Abigail Robinson 10 mo 1812 " and " Thos: Richardson his Book 1714 ", the former (1760-1835) being granddaughter of the latter (1681-1761) and

great-great-aunt of the present owners. Some account of these ancestors will be found in Anna W. Wood's essay in the *Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society*, Rhode Island, for October, 1922.

The history of the volume before it came into the hands of Thomas Richardson, the Newport, Rhode Island, ship-master, in 1714 is unknown.<sup>1</sup> But since the papers copied can none of them be definitely dated after 1683 or thereabouts, it may have been collected before Fox's death in 1691. It was not in the hands of the London compiler of the great Annual Catalogue of Fox's works in 1694 and was later or less detailed than some of the sources that he used.

Though many of the epistles were such as obtained general circulation, a good many are addressed originally to the Barbadoes, and other evidence connects the contents with that island. Either the book itself was compiled there and was brought to Newport or it was compiled on the mainland on the basis of materials that had come *via* the West Indian islands.

Of over 125 pieces in the book two are from William Edmundson, two from George Whitehead, nine from John Burnyeat (six of these are printed in his life), three from meetings—the frequently occurring epistles from London Friends (1675), Dublin half year's meeting and Lancashire Women Friends (1677). The rest, numbering about 110, are by George Fox and of these over forty have not been published, though some of them exist in other MS. collections.

Being all religious epistles of a general and edifying nature they contain little of biographical or narrative interest. But their references to slavery are of special interest in disclosing the limited but progressive sensitiveness of early Friends as they first came in contact with the institution.

Another group of papers of some interest is formed by the several sermons of Fox reported *in extenso*. They are much longer than most of the other items and together occupy about one-third of the volume. They give some impression of the length as well as of the character of Fox's oral preaching, even though what is said of one of them be true of others (p. 184): "much more was spoken by G.F.

<sup>1</sup> Some notes on its possible origin are given at the end of this article.

in this meeting which could not be so fully taken as they were spoken". In subject matter and style they resemble his well-known printed writings, though their occasional personal reference and reminiscence is less usual in his general epistles or doctrinal pamphlets. The list of these is given below, with the pages, with the occasion, and, where possible, with a reference to other copies. To estimate their length one may allow in this volume at least 1,200 words to the page.

Pages

- 81-87 Barbadoes, 8 mo. 1671. Printed in George Fox's *Gospel Family-Order*.
- 87-103 Yearly Meeting, London, [4 mo. 11] 1674. Headley MSS. (Friends House), 247-283.
- 103-112 Women's Meeting, Barbadoes, 1671. New England Book of Epistles, 1-6.
- 153-161 Devonshire House, London, 3 mo. 1677.
- 168-176 Yearly Meeting, London, 3 mo. [25 or 30] 1675. Pennington MSS. (Friends House), iv. 90-98.
- 176-184 [Yearly Meeting, London], 3 mo. [21] 1678. Cf. *Short Jnl.*, p. 271.
- 195-202 General Meeting, Wheeler St., London, 4 mo. 1680. Swarthmore MSS. (Friends House), v. 121 and Nicholson MSS. (Liverpool), viii.
- 204-210 Yearly Meeting, London, 3 mo. [24] 1681. Dartmouth (Mass) Women's M.M., 18-25.

NOTES ON THE POSSIBLE ORIGIN OF THE VOLUME  
AND INSTANCES OF ITS USE.

It may be conjectured that the book belonged originally to a local meeting—monthly, quarterly or yearly. Other examples of such books are in existence, e.g. in America one for Little Egg Harbor Monthly Meeting (New Jersey) and one for New England Yearly Meeting, while in many cases the minute book itself contained the same kind of material in large amounts, e.g. Women's Monthly Meeting at Dartmouth, Mass. Early in the minutes of the Women's Quarterly Meeting held at Portsmouth and Newport (1706-1783) occurs the minute under date of 8.iii.1706 :

It is agreed that for time to come Leah Newberry or Ruth Fry bring the Quarterly Meeting book . . . also that the

Book of Epistles be Brought to these our Quarterly Meetings  
In order that some of them may be read, for Edification, &  
as occasion may require.

In the New England Epistle Book referred to above a colophon to the MS. entitled "Some of the Heads of what G.F. delivered at the Women's Meeting at Rhode Island the 18th of the 4th month 1672 at William Coddingtons" reads "Let this be read sometimes in your meeting once a Quarter . . . when your business is not much."

It would be tempting to associate the Richardson MSS. with Rhode Island Quarterly Meeting of which Thomas Richardson was long clerk. But the date of his signature in the volume, 1714, is too early, for the original minute book of that meeting, 1681-1746 (now at Moses Brown School, Providence, R.I.), shows both by minutes and by handwriting that the first clerk John Easton was replaced in 1708 by John Stanton, Jr., since "John Easton ye former Clark of this Meeting is Antient and is willing to be dismissed" and that John Stanton acted until in 8 mo. 1717 "this meeting doth appoint Thomas Ritcheson Clark of said meeting". Richardson's handwriting begins with minutes of the next quarter. A better suggestion is that the book is the very book of Epistles mentioned in the Minutes of Rhode Island Women's Quarterly Meeting. For Thomas Richardson married for his first wife Ann Newberry daughter of the Leah Newberry there mentioned and he may have obtained the book or custody of it in that way.

Beside the reference in *The Friend* (Phila.) in 1887 what seems to be certain evidence of the use of this book exists earlier, also in Philadelphia. In 1843 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting published *A Brief Statement of the Rise and Progress of the Testimony of the Society of Friends against Slavery and the Slave Trade*. This able review, on which all later writers heavily depend, was probably composed by Nathan Kite. On page six he quotes from a public discourse spoken on Barbadoes by George Fox and on page seven from an epistle of William Edmundson. These passages occur in the Richardson MSS. on pages 86 and 23 respectively.

The wording of the Fox passage agrees with the MS. against the text as printed in 1676 and 1701 in Fox's *Gospel Family Order*. The Epistle of Edmundson was not previously printed but the very passage quoted in it has been marked in ink by a reader of the MS. with a fist or index (☞). It is of course possible that these quotations in the pamphlet were derived from some other manuscripts but I think it more probable that the Richardson volume was used by Nathan Kite about 1842.