

William Dewsbury and the Popish Plot

By HENRY J. CADBURY, Ph.D.

IN 1948 I published a group of thirty-three letters connected with William Dewsbury and long practically unknown though well preserved in the record room of Friends at York (*Letters to William Dewsbury and Others*, Supplement No. 22 to the Journal of the Friends' Historical Society). One of them (p. 62) was unique in that it was a letter of the infamous Titus Oates exonerating William Dewsbury of complicity with Popery. It alone of these pieces had been published in Dewsbury's works. It is in answer to a letter of inquiry from a Mr. Whitfield, who appears to be John Whitfield (c. 1631-1705), rector of Bugbrooke in Northamptonshire, and it refers to a certificate by some other persons on behalf of Dewsbury. It was therefore only one of three associated documents.

I have come by accident on copies of all three, actually printed in a controversial London newspaper of the time. It is *The Observer*, published by Roger L'Estrange, No. 159, Wednesday, 21st June, 1682. Oates' letter is in slightly different wording and is therefore reproduced below along with the other two. The journalist claims that it was known to him in Oates' own hand, and that Whitfield was a friend to L'Estrange. The twenty signatories to the other certificate can nearly all be recognized as London Friends.

The dialogue preceding and following the documents runs in part as follows :

Whig. Dr. Oates swore his Narrative before the Council, Sept. 28. 1678. and in March following there was a Person taken up at Northampton for a Jesuit ; whereupon a worthy Friend of mine wrote to Dr. Oates this Letter, & received the Following Answer. But take notice, that it was first read Publikely at a Quakers Meeting, as I am well Enform'd, and after delivered by a Quaker to my Friend, according to the Address. . . . Here's the Doctors Letter, Spelling and all, and I'me sure he will not deny it.

William Dewsbury was probably not the only Friend to suffer as a result of the extraordinary fiction of a Popish Plot and it is to the credit of the scoundrel who invented

it that he was willing to defend Dewsbury and implicitly other Friends. Conversely, we are told that somewhat later the Quaker, William Penn, attempted to intercede for Titus Oates.

Sir, I presume, though utterly unknown to give you notice, that on Thursday last there was taken up at Northampton, one Dewsborough, a Great Pretended Apostle of the Quakers, but, as I have it from very good hands, You can make him appear to be a Jesuite. He is a Person that has usually made Triennial Visitations in these Parts, wherein he has been highly Mischievous ; & particularly in the Parish of Bugbrook, near Northampton, occasioning great Confluences, and withall Great Seductions of People from their Loyalty & Allegiance to the King, into Seditious & Dangerous Factions. If you please to send anything of Notice to Me, or the Mayor of Northampton concerning him, that may be anyway Significant, you will do a great kindness to this Country, and more particularly to

March 10. 1678.

Your Humble Servant. J.W.

Mr. W.

Yours I received in which you mention one dewsbrough his Name is William Deusberry a Quaker, whome you wold doe well to discharge. hee is noe Jesuit, nor lyke one : I looke on it to bee our discretion not to meddle with any protestant dessenter in this day, but bend our forces against the common Enemy of protestant religion and the papists & endeavour to win by argument those that are dessentors from us. Sr here is a Certificate from some that have knowne him these 20 yeares and upwards, who are men of repute in their Generations and protestants. and I pray did you ever know that there was any such Correspondency betwixt Jesuits and Quakers as might render them Suspicious ? or did you ever know any priests or Jesuits in their Meettings or there Suffer'd to preach ? for I know the Jesuits and the Quakers ; and there is such vast difference in points of religion, that it is as possible to reconcyle light and darknes as to reconcyle them, though they may appeare different from us yet they are I thinke no Murderers as the Papists have been & are. I have no more but that I am yours though Unknown,

13 Mar 78. stilo novo.

TIT. OATES.

London the 13. primo call'd March 1678.

Whereas We understand that Will. Dewsberry of Warwick is apprehended & Imprisoned at Northampton upon Suspicion of being a Jesuit or Papist : these are to Certifie all persons concerned, that we whose names are underwritten, being Inhabitants in and about London, and having known the said Will. Dewsberry for many years (Some of us above 20 years) do testify, that to our Certain knowledge, he is neither Jesuite, Popish Priest, nor Papist, nor in the least so much as Popishly-Affected, or inclined thereunto,

but has been known for these many years to be a Peaceable man in his Conversation, in Society with the People call'd Quakers, and hath frequently born publick testimony against the Spirit, Root, and branch of Popery, and farther we do not understand, that ever he was out of the 3 Nations of England, Scotland and Ireland.

Ezekiel Woolley ¹	Will. Welch	Tho. Hart
E. Billinge	Ri. Cannon ³	Nat Bowman ²
Tho. Tanton	Hugh Lambe	Tho. Zachary ⁵
Tam. Brain Elder. ²	John Tyse ⁴	James Claypool
Avery ²	Samuel Claye ²	Rich Mew
Alex. Parker	Geo. Whitehead	Will. Crowch
Tho. Rudyerd	Sam. Groom	

¹ For most of the signatories see notes in George Fox's *Journal* (Camb.) and the *Short Journal*; see also Besse's *Sufferings*.

² Not identified.

³ Richard Cannon of London.

⁴ John Tyso [?= John Tyse] of London, c. 1627-1701.

⁵ Thomas Zachary of London, c. 1622-1686.

Thomas Shillitoe's Dying Testimony

Hugh Doncaster has called my attention to the fact that a copy of this testimony was printed in William Hodgson's *The Society of Friends in the 19th Century*, vol. I, p. 312 seq. (Philadelphia, 1875), and that it is there stated that the "last work" of J. J. Gurney's was the new edition of his *Peculiarities of Friends*. The identification is in brackets and clearly editorial, but its source is not given, nor is information given as to the source of the testimony.

It seems probable that the historian, who was himself strongly opposed to Joseph John Gurney's teaching, had access to the copy of the testimony which we know to have been used by John Wilbur, and that this was also the ground for the identification of the book in question.

T.E.H.

Periodicals Exchanged

Receipt of the following periodicals is gratefully acknowledged :

Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association (Philadelphia).

Wesley Historical Society, Proceedings.

Presbyterian Historical Society, Proceedings.

Presbyterian Historical Journal (U.S.A.).

Unitarian Historical Society, Transactions.

Mennonite Quarterly Review (U.S.A.).

Institute of Historical Research, Bulletin.