

Warnings and Prophecies

IN many places soon after the spread of Quakerism there are reports of Friends—both travelling ministers and recent converts—going into the places of worship of other bodies and delivering warnings to repent. Sometimes these actions led to disturbances, and a proportion of the sufferings recorded in Besse are directly due to them. It has usually been argued that the phase in Quaker development during which these activities took place was soon over, and that at least from the Restoration in 1660, Friends had settled to evangelize by less unorthodox methods.

This view does not take into account a considerable under-current of the old propaganda spirit which persisted throughout the Caroline period, and was strong enough to be regarded as “of Dangerous Consequence” in Queen Anne’s reign by Friends who had found in toleration the rest they desired.

The following notes may illustrate the forms these warnings and prophecies took during the fifty years or so after the King came “into his own again.”

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“If any Warne,” wrote George Bishop at the critical time just after the Restoration, “Let it be in the Authority of God.”¹ It was with the conviction that they had a message entrusted to them by God which must be delivered, that Friends gave their messages in churches, in the streets, and to the Protector or King himself.

The messages had elements of prophecy in millenaristic style of approaching doom, as evidenced in the ending of Bishop’s *Last Trump*.²

Friends and People all, hear whilst ye have time, a little time, a very little time, Turn unto the Lord . . . if you turn not, your day is closing up, your night is at hand which will never have end . . . you will be for ever seperated from the presence of God, and must bear his Wrath for ever and ever, if you turn not, and that speedily ; It is the last Trump, or warning to you from the Lord, through His Servant, Geo. Bishop.

¹ George Bishop to a London Friend, 2.vii.1660 ; in his *A few words in season* (1660), 4.

² 3.iii.1662. George Bishop : *The last trump. Or, One warning more yet to the people of these nations* (1662), 13.

These vague warnings can be fitly compared with the visionary character of some of the same author's writings: in his *Burden of Babylon*¹ he notes at the end

“ this Triumph I heard in the Valley of Vision, and this Burden I saw in the Valley of Decision, even the Burden of Babylon, and the Triumph of Sion as I was in the Deep the 24 and 25, 8 Month, 1661.”

More remarkable in having a personal interest were the messages and warnings given to various eminent people—notably to Charles II—either on some special emergency or requesting a general reformation. In December, 1662, George Bishop wrote²

“ To the King of England, These,
 Friend
 Ther is but a Minute between Thee & the breaking
 forth of the fierce Anger of the Lord against Thee,
 if Thou release not presently his People whoe sorely Suffer by
 Thee in Noysome Jailes, & that unto Death. Moved of the Lord
 I am to Write this to Thee whoe am.
 Thy friend whoe truely
 Loves Thee
 Bristoll. 5th 10th Month. 1662. Geo. Bishope.”

Two years later, under the stress of Conventicle Act persecution George Bishop wrote several warning letters to the King, in one of which he included the following warning from the Lord against banishment for conscience sake, “ For, if you do, I will send my Plagues upon you.”³

Sewel quotes George Bishop's warning to the King of 29th July, 1664, against banishment under the Conventicle Act, he continues :⁴

“ Now the prediction of George Bishop was fulfilled, and the plagues of the Lord fell so heavily on the persecutors, that the eagerness to banish the Quakers, and send them away, began to abate.”

In this, Sewel is illustrating the tendency for Friends to look for God's judgment in the subsequent misfortunes of their

¹ *The burden of Babylon, and the triumph of Sion* (1661), 6.

² 5.x.1662. MS. in Portfolio I. 35 (Friends House). This concerns the persecutions under the Quaker Act, 1662.

³ *The Warnings of the Lord to the King of England and his Parliament* (1667), 17. Also printed as a broadside.

⁴ Sewel's *History* (1811), I, 174.

persecutors—a tendency manifest in the queries issued by London Y.M. asking for accounts of “ sundry judgments on persecutors.”

Mention might also be made of the warning written from Newgate by Charles Baily to the King, threatening him with a share in the whirlwind of the Lord that is coming over the nation, he having seen a vision of those allied with him feeding as for the slaughter, and advises him to “ avoid rioting and excess, chambering and wantonness, oppression ” for which the land mourns.¹ Similar in tone is that delivered in person seven years later by Mary Bradshaw of Bristol :²

“ Oh king of England thy wayes are not right, thy force is not good, I am a daughter of Syon whom the Lord hath redeemed out of Eygipt, & he hath sent me to Warne thee to fly out of Babilon & to escape out of Sodom. & enter into the Land of Zoar. that the Sun may rise upon the Land.”

The stress which deliverers of personal messages underwent before “ giving up ” may be judged by what Elizabeth Stirredge wrote after she had been to London and delivered a warning to the King³

“ My Soul honoureth and magnifieth the Name and Power of the Lord my God, for keeping me faithful to his blessed Testimony, and giving me Strength to do his Will, and made good his Promise, which was, *If I could believe, I should return in Peace, and my Reward should be with me.*”

Prophecies were not always in such general terms that whether or not they came true as the deliverer of them expected, no direct proof could be given against their truth. Solomon Eccles declared prophetically at Bristol during the controversy with John Wilkinson and John Story “ That John Story should that Year dye ; because he taught Rebellion.”⁴ This was proved false by Story’s surviving the limited time, and Eccles lived to condemn his hasty spirit.⁵

¹ 4.vii.1663 ; see *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1663-64, 266.

² 5.iii.1670 (message came to Mary Bradshaw, 15.ii.1670). MS. in Portfolio I, 47.

³ *Strength in weakness manifest* (1711), 40.

⁴ William Rogers : *The Seventh part of the Christian-Quaker* (1682), 79.

⁵ Stephen Crisp : *A memorable account* (1694), 461. Eccles condemned his prophecy, Barbados, 30.iii.1681.

Warnings were not only addressed to individuals, but also to the world in general or to one particular city. Charles Marshall relates¹ how he cleared his conscience of Bristol early in his ministry :

“ in all manner of plainness, I have declared the truth as it is in Jesus, manifesting the many snares of the enemy that do attend Friends in that city ; and I am clear of the blood of the inhabitants thereof, and of all professing the truth therein ; and am assured that a day of deep trial will come upon many of its inhabitants.”

At a later date he gave a note of implied doom in his *Memorial of the Tender Mercies of the Lord unto Bristol's Inhabitants* dated November 1683,² warning them

“ But if you will harden your Hearts, and stiffen your Necks, and will not hear, my Soul shall mourn in the sight of your Distress that will overtake as Travail on a Woman, wherein your Faces will gather Paleness, your Hearts be filled with Anguish.”

Dorcas Dole wrote in similar strain³

“ And thee O City of Bristol in perticuler ; for thy Inhabitants have greatly provoked the Lord against them, and without they do speedily return unto the Lord with true and unfeigned Repentance, the Wrath of God will break forth upon thee, and there shall be none able to deliver thee from the Stroak of his Hand . . . for some of thy Inhabitants have committed no less Evil than Great Rebellion against the God of Heaven, in that they have not only rejected, but also despised the Appearance of Christ in themselves and others.”

Elizabeth Stirredge too was moved to write similar exhortations, and warned in her *Salutation of my Endeared Love*⁴

“ Oh ! thou City of Bristol, a City of the Mercies of the Living God, he hath highly favoured thee ; thou hast had a Day and a Time, wherein thou mightest have Inriched thy self with the Treasures of God's Kingdom, and mightest have grown strong in the Lord, and in the Power of his Might, whereby thou mightest have stood in a living Testimony for the Lord, with one consent, as one Man ; But now Behold, the days of thy Distress are at hand, and thy Calamity like an Armed Man.”

¹ Charles Marshall : *Journal* (1844), 23 ; fol. 56 in the 1704 edition. The date is about 1672.

² *A Tender Visitation in the Love of God* (1684), 23.

³ *Once more a warning to thee O England* (1683), 3.

⁴ 1683 ; reprinted in her *Strength in weakness manifest* (1711), 185-6.

What exactly the "Stroak" and the "Calamity" expected were to be is not stated, and so long as warnings were confined to such general terms, Friends (at this later date careful of their name and integrity) did not often take exception to these warnings of coming doom. During the last decade of the century, however, a certain coldness is discernible in Friends' attitude to those of their number who ventured to deliver such messages in the streets.

John Love of Canterbury, in Bristol in June, 1698, had an "Excercises in going thru ye streets of sd City with : A Meshed frome ye Lord . . . for which sd Excercises . . . hee meett with some Jelosieess in ye harts of some Friends Concerning his being in unity with friends "

and thought fit to secure a certificate from Kent Friends as to his character and unity with them.¹ A bald minute of Bristol Men's Meeting dated 14th May, 1694² states :

" Upon the 12th day of this present thurd moneth 1694 being on the Seaventh day of the weeke Thomas Rudd one of the people called Quakers. went through the streets of this City of Bristoll with severall of his friends accompanieing him Lifting up his hands as he went with a Lowd and destinct voice with greate Zeale and weight of Spirrit Saying

Woe From God
Woe from God
Oh all be warned
Oh to feare god.

also he the sd. Tho: Rudd past throug the streets againe on this 14th Instant . . . Saying Oh all be warned this day to feare before the lord the mighty god of heaven & of earth and every one torne from the Evill of your waies."

It appears, however, from a reference in Coole's *Quakers cleared*,³ quoting from the *Spirit of Quakerism*, that Thomas Rudd was taken before the mayor and courteously treated, and his message copied and hung by Friends in their houses. Thomas Rudd is reported to have had a similar exercise the next spring, when he cried through the streets " O the Dreadful and Almighty God will Dreadfully Plead because of Sin."⁴

¹ Friars M.H. Bristol, records ; vol. 140 (Ministers' certificates), 1-2 (19.v.1698) ; see Richard Bury : *A collection of sundry messages and warnings* (2nd ed. 1712), 11.

² Friars M.H. records ; vol. 202, p. 91 (Minutes of Men's Two-week meeting). Compare Bury, *op. cit.*, 2.

³ *The Quakers Cleared from being apostates* (1696), 92.

⁴ 6.iii.1695 ; Bury, *op. cit.*, 8.

A series of more particular prophecies and warnings and visions of doom occurring at the same time probably reflect the feeling among certain Friends that Bristol was a second Babylon. Isaac Alexander, a young minister visiting Bristol from the north in 1700, declared at meeting "That many people should be taken away . . . so suddenly, that they should not have time to say, Lord have Mercy on me!"¹ Samuel Bownas writes of this prophecy of mortality as to come about "as a judgment upon the people. for their pride and wickedness."² Bristol Friends taking note of Isaac's "strong and positive terms" "were afraid he was too much exalted in himself," and having been spoken to by some elders who advised him to return home, he went north. Later in the year, when Isaac was wishing to make another journey, Westmorland Friends reported their satisfaction in his deparment since his return and did not doubt but that Bristol Friends would receive him "in yt love which Edyphies & in Charity wch thinks noe ill but rather Couers weaknesses," he promising not to deliver messages without informing some older Friends.³ Bristol Friends replied suitably that they considered him a sincere young man and could receive him with love.

More melodramatic was the declaration of John Hall, another northern Friend, in Bristol meeting in 1693:⁴

"Friends, Thus saith the Lord . . . It is my Determination . . . to visit some part of this Nation, and among other Places, this City, with a great, a dreadful and most terrible Earthquake, where-withal I will cause this City to sink into the Earth, and will make of the Place, where it now stands, a Pool of Water. And this my Determination I will shortly bring to pass, except the People speedily Repent."

The previous night Richard Parker, a Friend who had been greatly concerned against the appearance of luxury among Bristol Friends, had a dream and saw the city as if the streets were under water, the earth torn and many of the houses upside down with people removing furniture and goods in great haste.⁵ Two years later he claimed to have had a

¹ Bury, *op. cit.*, 12.

² Bownas: *Account* (1795), 18.

³ Letter from J. Blayklinge and others to Richard Snead and others, postmark 21.x.1700. Preserved in Friars M.H. records; vol. 139, p. 151.

⁴ 29.viii.1693; Bury, *op. cit.*, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

vision in which he learned the date of the coming overthrow of the city, but forgot the year and month of the calamity, only remembering on waking that it was to be on the 11th day of the month.¹ Another dream of a Bristol earthquake was that of Elizabeth Wilson in June, 1696, who saw men riding from Bristol on market day all sooty because an earthquake had shaken the soot down the chimneys!² More in line with John Hall's message is the account that Thomas Story saw in 1697 a vision of Bristol after an earthquake with only the spires standing above the waters.³

The message of John Hall in Bristol meeting in October, 1693, was confused with Thomas Rudd's warning in the streets in May, 1694, and retold by Henry Winder, the author of *The Spirit of Quakerism* (1696), to ridicule Friends. Benjamin Coole in his reply⁴ admits some truth, but does not attempt to enlighten the pamphleteer:

"something he has got by the end and as he thinks will Reproach the Quakers, and out it goes without Fear or Wit, Two Stories jumbled together with great Additions and downright falshoods; and were it not for that, I should gratifie him too much, I would relate the Truth of that Matter, that he hath so confused himself about."

The event shows how any extravagance could be twisted and turned against Friends, and by the end of the century, the prophetic messages which still came out (particularly against pride) were in definite disfavour as smacking of fanaticism and wild enthusiasm, not to the liking of the new quietism which became oblivious to earlier manifestations which attended the rise of Quakerism. Friends in 1700 did not take kindly to prophecies and they strove to persuade Richard Bury not to publish the account he had collected of various visions and prophecies recorded in the 1690s, and when (despite warnings) he persisted in publishing, the Bristol Men's Meeting testified against him in a strong minute as a "whimsicall & disorderly person."⁵ Bury's

¹ Bury, *op. cit.*, 8. Dated 1695.

² *Ibid.*, 8-9.

³ *Ibid.*, 10. No mention of this appears in Story's *Journal*, and it is possible that Richard Bury may misrepresent Thomas Story (see Bristol Men's Two-week Meeting minutes, vol. 2, p. 223; 29.x.1701).

⁴ *The Quakers Cleared* (1696), 92.

⁵ Bristol Men's Two-week Meeting minutes, vol. 2, p. 223; 29.x.1701.

second edition (1712) called forth further protests from Bristol Friends, and there was no voice raised in his favour when the Men's meeting deplored the wide publication of prophecies and warnings which had been given to Friends, and wrote to the Meeting for Sufferings disavowing him.¹

One cannot fail to notice that the messages and warnings came through Friends who, if perhaps not so staid and solid as leading southern Friends had become, were alive to the need for reformation and repentance within the church itself. They, in common with other Friends with no such spectacular visions, felt that Bristol was too fashionable and yielding to worldly temptations: "Turn from the Evil of your Ways"² was the burden of their complaint.

RUSSELL S. MORTIMER

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During the last two or three years the Committee of the Friends' Historical Society has made special efforts to bring to the notice of Friends and others information regarding the Society with a view to increasing its membership.

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¹ Bristol Men's Two-week Meeting minutes, vol. 3, pp. 137-8; 22, 24.x.1711 and 5.xi.1711. The book (dated 1712) was evidently in print at that time.

² The words are Thomas Rudd's; Bury, *op. cit.*, 2.