

Two Italian Reporters on Quakerism

LORENZO MAGALOTTI travelled through parts of England in the suite of Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany, in 1669, and wrote an account of the journey. The manuscript was translated into English at a later date, and finally printed as a handsome quarto volume in 1821 (*Travels of Cosmo the Third, Grand Duke of Tuscany, through England, during the reign of King Charles the Second (1669)*). Translated from the Italian manuscript in the Laurentian Library at Florence. London, Printed for J. Mawman, 1821).

In his account of English sects, the author devotes four pages to Friends (pp. 447-451). The survey, though superficial, is of some interest as a sample collection of errors and misrepresentations which went to make up the popular notion of Quakerism ; as can be seen below :

SECT OF THE TREMBLERS, OR QUAKERS

The sect of the Tremblers, or Quakers, was begun by James Naylor ; and, for the purpose of propagating it beyond England, one of the members was sent by the society into Hungary and Transylvania, to bring over those nations to their belief. There were thirteen of them in the first instance ; at the head of whom was Naylor, a wicked man, called by his disciples Jesus Christ, whom he endeavoured to imitate in his voice, actions, and appearance ; and as he was travelling from London towards Bristol on horseback, his followers spread their cloaks and strewed branches on the ground, applauding and shouting in the words of benediction which the multitudes of old made use of to Christ, " Hosanna ! benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini ! " (Hosanna ! blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord !). He arrogated to himself the power of raising the dead, of healing the sick, and, in imitation of Christ, of fasting forty days. This sect, by its pretended sanctity, obtained the ascendancy over all the others, its hypocrisy being extreme. Some of the individuals of it, however, are more humble, apparently more spiritual, and more full of Christ. Towards the poor and afflicted, they are compassionate and liberal. In all their external conversation, they are so modest and affable, that any simple person would take them for saints. They do not make any sign of obeisance to any one, even to those in authority ; so that, sooner than take off their hats in the king's presence, they would lose their heads. To their enemies and persecutors they return good for evil, offering the other

cheek. In the meditations which they make in the public places of the city, they remain as it were in an exstasy, and tremble through their whole body, whence they are called Tremblers. While they are in this state, they utter horrible cries, shed tears, and heave profound sighs from the bottom of their breasts; and when they recover themselves, they talk of the supreme majesty, of the glory, of the greatness of the light, and of the divine splendour which they enjoy in that pretended elevation of the mind. Their numbers increased in a short time to such an extent, that they rendered themselves formidable to all England, being estimated, in the year when Charles II was restored, at upwards of sixty thousand. Many of them have been sent out as apostles throughout almost the whole world; and two of them came to Rome in the year 1658, to convert the Pope, as they foolishly talked. They were there arrested, and interrogated as to their false doctrines; which are as follow:

1. The Quakers call themselves Catholics; they are perfect in this life, and no stain of sin is found in them.

2. Every person ought to be contented with that doctrine which he acquires by the inspiration of the internal spirit.

3. Baptism with water, or external ablution, is of no use, and, therefore, ought to be rejected as superfluous.

4. Among the Quakers, there is no one that has not the Spirit of God within him.

5. The reasonable soul is part of the Divinity, and exists before the body.

6. All men have within them a certain light, by which they may be saved without any other assistance from God.

7. We are justified by the natural justice peculiar to ourselves, which is within us.

8. After this mortal life, no other state of being is to be expected.

9. Those passages of Scripture which refer to heaven, hell, and the resurrection of the dead, are fables.

10. It is not in the power of a perfect man, that is, a Quaker, to sin.

11. The sacred things of the other sects are heathenish.

12. No Christian possesses any private property; for among real Christians all things ought to be in common.

13. Among real Christians one ought not to rule over another, and no one ought to be called *Master*, or *Sir*, nor ought any reverence to be made to men in passing them.

14. The liberty of preaching, and of prophesying, is to be refused to none who is truly called, not even to women. There are also two and thirty additional articles.

LUIGI ANGIOLINI

More than a century later, a second Italian who left record of his visit to Britain and of his impressions of Friends came to this country. Luigi Angiolini, the traveller, who was subsequently foreign secretary to the ruler of Tuscany,

and in 1797 the Tuscan ambassador to Paris, was born in 1750 at Seravezza. He was educated at the University of Padua, and during the course of a European tour in 1787, he spent eight months in Britain. On his return to Florence, he published anonymously *Lettere sopra l'Inghilterra, la Scozia e l'Olanda* (2 vols. Firenze, Allegrini, 1790)—the letters on Holland were never, in fact, published.

We are indebted to Mr. G. S. Darlow, of Leeds University, for drawing attention to this work and for providing the following translation.

Having mentioned in the fifth letter (part I) that he had stayed with a Quaker family during his visit to Chelmsford for the assizes, Angiolini devotes the next letter to an account of the Quakers. The author shows considerable knowledge of Friends ; but sympathetic understanding is not to be expected. Additional interest attaches to some of his remarks, however much he misunderstood, because they were written after attending meetings for worship.

THE QUAKERS

Having agreed to entrust myself to the Quakers, I want to tell you what I think about them, even at the cost of telling you some things you already know. So be persuaded of the facts I set forth, and then judge of their consequences as you will. I found the family with whom I lodged very modest, frugal, quiet, industrious, and of a cleanliness so exacting that the means of attaining it could hardly fail to be inconvenient and tiresome to one who is not a Quaker. Apropos of this, you may be amused to hear, in parenthesis, how one morning, arising from bed with the aftermath of a fever contracted from the extreme cold I had felt on the previous day in Chelmsford criminal court, I went downstairs half dressed to search for a means of relieving a call of nature. I imagined that as in all houses within my experience until then, there would be a convenience in the court, or Yard as they call it, or somewhere close at hand. With this idea in mind, I followed the guide who offered to show me the way ; but he, after making me cross half the town, led me to a garden a third of a mile away. Although this custom was truly inconvenient, I could not help laughing, so odd did it appear, apart from the novelty of it.

The Quakers, both men and women, dress in a very simple style, of an extreme propriety. They put on no adornments, no lace trimmings, no bright colours, and no jewellery. They raise their hats to no one, and never bow the head to anyone, even to the King. They speak little, with moderation, without compliments, and with as much exactitude as possible. Yes and No are customary expressions in their mouths. They claim to be Christians, but with other Christians they have nothing in common but the Bible. They have

no sacrament and no ritual ; no priests ; no ecclesiastical establishment, and perhaps no fixed tenet but the existence of God. What we call a church is for them just a meeting-place, without any decoration. There they sit in no order of precedence, although the women sit apart, and there reigns an air of melancholy and deep meditation. The silence is complete. It is broken by anyone, man or woman, who feels himself inspired to speak. All the communicants believe themselves thus to be divinely inspired, claiming to be guided within by the true voice of God. The inspiration is heralded with trembling, with sighs, with moans, with a strain amounting to a convulsion ; it is finally uttered in a low voice, hesitantly ; often the utterer knows not what he is saying, and much less do his hearers. In such circumstances I myself have many times attended meetings, for any person of suitable demeanor is permitted to attend, provided that he remains silent and calm. Presiding over them are certain persons elected by members, whom they call elders. Their government is truly democratic. These elders are the heads ; they have the right to admonish members of their chapter who do not behave themselves with fitting propriety, they provide for the needy, give advice and assistance, receive donations, impose punishments. The Quakers will never consent to take an oath ; they claim that the truth of their declaration is sufficient surety, and that one should not pronounce the name of God for profane purposes, nor put a sacred value on mundane objects. They refuse under all conditions to take up arms.

For these reasons, and because the Quakers are in the ordinary transactions of daily life honest, gentle and moderate, many people are inclined to think that the sect is closest in method—if that is the right word—to those primitive sects, children of nature and of the religious enthusiasm that animated early man before he was enlightened or corrupted by experience, when he felt the need of a guidance which circumstances caused him to believe could come only from a superior Being. I do not know the aims and forces that moved Fox and the other founders ; I do not know whether they had political aims in mind, or if they were genuinely sincere in the simplicity of their habits, the gentleness of their character, and in that unspoiled practice of doing good, which proves its sincerity by its influence.

Perhaps they have these qualities, as I believe had the pioneers of the Catholic religious orders. . .

But to return to the Quakers : if their society in its original conception was regarded from the point of view of religion and the conduct of life, to my eyes it now seems like a political theory with a tendency towards independence and self-interest. That this should be so, a likely proof is the certain fact that every year in the provinces they hold, under the pretext of religious aims, conferences to which some members come from provincial cities 250 or 300 miles away ; and in examining the state of trade of their respective cities, they take a record of the affairs of every merchant, the nature of his business, of his methods and of his way of life. Such is the value drawn from this investigation by the great Quaker houses of London,

Bristol and Liverpool, that they keep in business in every city some adherent of the sect, and establish one where there is none, being the more certain of custom by their cloak of modesty, of indifference to all that is not concerned with their religion and their occupation. I have said, and you already know, that they will not take the oath in courts of justice, a privilege that the government grants them in civil cases as well as criminal, except that the law does not inflict the death penalty on the word of a Quaker alone. I can add that a Quaker is exempt from the rules of his sect in a case where the crime affects himself or his property. Then he puts aside his charity in favour of self-interest, and condemns to death the unfortunate who has relied on his hypocrisy. The refusal to raise the hat, to salute or bow to anybody, proclaims a pride and arrogance that destroys or is opposed to every diversity of rank, however necessary, and that tends towards an equalitarianism truly incompatible with the general usages of contemporary society. The Quaker shows, it is true, an extraordinary probity in his business dealings; but since for this reason largely he has a greater volume of business and has a greater number of clients, I may be allowed to question whether this probity derives from sentiment or from motives of business. That this is possible, I quote as an example that a Quaker will willingly and shamelessly abandon his principles when faced with the chance of making a fortune at one stroke, not recking the possibility of being expelled by the others, who are perhaps waiting for an opportunity, in their cautious way, to imitate his apostasy. In short, the sect of Quakers, which fortunately can never be increased much farther, because then they would defeat their own object, is, in my opinion, a hindrance to any kind of civil government, and more pernicious than certain sects of friars are believed to be in a catholic polity. It tends more than they do to concentrate in itself the largest possible share of the wealth of the community, without giving to the same any return, even when in danger of destruction, in the form of armed service—deploring, as they say, the shedding of human blood on religious grounds.

This sect, from a religious standpoint, bears a close resemblance to the only known organised body of deists, I mean the Sages of China, followers of the famous Confucius. From a political standpoint, it derives much of its method from certain Asiatic dynasties, renowned for their ubiquity and for the close bond existing among them for countless years, in India, where they control such immense wealth, that local rulers and the East India Company itself and other merchant houses of European countries are heavily in debt to them, and must have recourse to them whenever they are in need of capital for their enterprises.

Forgive the length of this letter, and if there is but one new idea in it to satisfy you, I flatter myself I have not bored you.