A Frenchman looks at Rhode Island Quakers, 1801

Louis Ange Pitou, a Frenchman exiled to Cayenne under the revolutionary régime, was returning home to France in the spring of 1801. With a small party of his compatriots, Pitou reached Newport, R.I., 23rd June, 1801. Knowing no English, they were forced to make their wants known by sign language, until a shopkeeper took them to a Quaker, "M. William Eins, qui parle toutes les langues ". During a five-day stay at Newport before going to New York, the Frenchman took note of William "Eins" (Haines?) and the Quakers, and his observations are recorded in the book he published after his return to France, and from which the following translation is taken.[1]

M. Pitou and his fellow-travellers were much impressed by the kind reception they received at Newport, and his final remark on leaving America is one of gratitude for having found "dans les Américains, et sur-tout dans les Quakers, des amis généreux qui ont partagé gratuitement avec eux leurs fortunes, leur table et leurs maisons"..

M. WILLIAM EINS gave us refreshment and asked us many questions about Cayenne and our perilous journey thither. When we asked him to drink a health with us, he replied with a smile that we were in the house of a Quaker, and that that childish ceremony was forbidden to them by their law; that all men were brothers, and friendship neither increased nor diminished by the chinking of glasses.

These thoughtful moralists exaggerate only in the simplicity of their manners, clothes and conduct; imposingly phlegmatic, but not austere, their life passes in contemplation of the good which they do. They pride themselves on having no pride. The more one gets to know them, the more one admires them, without wishing to copy them; not because they are hypocrites—for no one is more honest than a Quaker who is truly faithful to the creed of Howard—but for the reason that they do not surround the palace of virtue with anything but cypress and weeping willow; they adorn it only with gloomy garments, and believe that it is disfigured when it is adorned with flowers and surrounded by beauty.

[1] *Voyage à Cayenne, dans les deux Amériques, et chez les Antropophages. Ouvrage . . . contenant . . . la vie et les causes de l'exil de l'auteur; des notions particulières . . . sur la religion, . . . des Créoles et des Quakers.* (Paris, An XIII, 1805). See pp. 347-51, 363 of Tome 2.

They never laugh, sing or dance, and do not use any form of salutation. They always keep their heads covered in church, as well as at public meetings and at court. They will not take an oath at law, and they are not required to do so; they say *Yea* or *Nay*. They fulfil to the letter the precept of the wisest of lawgivers, ordaining that one should not assert anything except by Yes or No. They say *Thee* and *Thou* to everyone; but this grammatical peculiarity in no way diminishes the respect which they have for offices and persons.

They are their own ministers and interpreters in matters of faith. Their churches are simple rooms, unadorned, ill-lit, and open to all, where each one betakes himself on Sunday to meditate in silence on the Bible and the New Testament. Often, they depart as they come without a word having been spoken, because the spirit has not moved any of the faithful. Another time a girl or a child, having meditated on a certain portion of scripture, mounts the pulpit and holds forth for any length of time. And that is the service and the worship. Such a preacher calls himself a Quaker or inspired trembler, but his inspiration is not acceptable to God unless his utterance comes without previous preparation; he must be like the Apostles, suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit. This religion, detached from obedience to the Pope, unites all its members in a love as sweet as that of the early Christians who peacefully enjoyed all things in common, and who did not allow any of their fellowship to beg.

Quakers' coats are buttonless and drab; they have straight hair and round or high hats without hooks or buttons. Quakeresses, like our widows, wear half-mourning; their bonnets are little caps adorned with unpleated lawn, tied under the chin.

All the Quakers, of every state (*de chaque état*), gather twice a year for solemn meetings in the towns, where they make a collection for poor members of the Society (*de la famille*). None of them stop at the inn, they all lodge with Quakers in town. As the members of this body are the most numerous, and were the earliest colonists of North America, known today as the United States, they have drawn up rules which have the authority of law. Thus, Sunday is given over entirely to meditation, to quiet pleasures or to riding through the streets or into the country.

Quakers have a horror of bloodshed and never make war; they pay for substitutes, and never go themselves unless they are forced. This last practice kept them from being involved when the colonists joined together in 1777 against the rule of the King of England, breaking away from their obedience and declaring themselves independent.

For the rest, all religions and all sects are tolerated and protected; each man may worship God in his own way, and may say, publish and advertise all that he thinks about the government and his rulers.

Laughter in Quaker Grey. By William H. Sessions. Wm. Sessions Ltd. 7s. 6d. 1952.

William H. Sessions' collection of anecdotes is a book for lighter moments, containing plenty of good Quaker stories. Some of them are calculated to amuse and even to produce peals of laughter whilst others reveal idiosyncrasies and peculiarities characteristic of the Society. One example must suffice, in the North Riding Dales (Yorkshire) folks say: "Quakers is queer folks; they marries theirsens, and they buries theresens."

One or two errors should be corrected in any future edition: p. 47, John Stephenson (*not* Stevenson) Rowntree; p. 54, the title of the book should read "The Friends, who (*not* what) they are, & what they have done." ROBERT DAVIS.

In the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 77, no. 3 (July, 1953), pp. 251-93, an article by John E. Pomfret on "The Proprietors of the Province of East New Jersey, 1682-1702" gives an account of each of the early proprietors, his interest in the colony, and the trend of the colony's development from 1682 when it was bought from the executors of Sir George Carteret, until the proprietory government was abolished by Queen Anne in 1702.

The author points out that, along with West New Jersey and the lands on the west of the lower Delaware, East New Jersey was initially regarded by leading Friends in Britain as territory to be included with Pennsylvania in a great experiment in religious freedom and good government. Of twenty-four proprietors twenty were Friends; William Penn and Robert Barclay the Apologist were among them, many were Londoners. Two were Irish and there were six Scots. Two of these last were Scottish peers, relatives of Robert Barclay, and all three enjoyed the friendship and favour of the Duke of York, soon to be James II. Barclay was appointed governor.

Under Penn's leadership, Pennsylvania was receiving most of the colonising effort of English Friends; there were few Friends in Scotland. Therefore Barclay, as absentee governor, with the goodwill of the other proprietors, successfully developed East Jersey as a considerable outlet for Scottish emigrants. For the Quaker proprietors it soon ceased to be part of the " Holy Experiment" and as a business interest became increasingly Scottish.