

will not give ym up to freinds unles freinds will give him 80 li which he saith he hath laid out to ye building of ye meeting houses in Bristol and yt ye writeings could be had as aforesaid. Charles Harford saith yt he would stand to ye owneing of ye meeting house so this money will be very hard to be raised. T. Gouldney is not willing to pay any part towards it & ye rest of ym. G[ouldney] is or was lately in London and if thy father had an oportunity to speake to him it might doe well¹ vale.

[address]

To Sarah Meade
at the signe of ye
Shipp in fanchurch
Street London
D.

[endorsed by G.F.]

Thomas robson to
sara mead 1682

The Midgley Library, Manchester

A Quaker Research Collection in the North of England

EARLIER this year the books and bookcase of the Midgley Library, housed for the last ninety years in the Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, were removed on permanent loan to the John Rylands Library, Deansgate, Manchester.

The Midgley Library consists of 221 volumes, representing a total of some 1,200 different items. Dates of publication range from the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the nineteenth century. About 1050 of the volumes and pamphlets—the vast majority of the whole—form a valuable collection of early Quaker works from the seventeenth century. To put this into proper perspective, it may be remembered that the output of Friends' works of the seventeenth century has been estimated at 6,000. The Midgley Library contains more than one in six of these. Approximately one-third of the works

¹ See W. C. Braithwaite, *Second Period*, 104. Thomas Callowhill held the counterparts of the Friars Meeting House deeds, but Friends did not resume possession of the keys until 1686; Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 16 & 30. viii. 1682; 27.vii.1686. Charles Harford already owned Temple Street Meeting House, Bristol's smaller meeting-house across Bristol Bridge, on the Somerset side of the Avon (for him see *Jnl. F.H.S.*, xliii, 77).

in the library were published in the 1660s, the year 1660 itself accounting for well over 100 pamphlets. Two striking things are worthy of note—the strength of the collection around the troubled Restoration years (300 items coming from the period 1658-61), and the spectacular drop from 33 items in 1665 to 6 in 1666, rising again to 32 in 1667 as printers renewed their presses and built up their stocks after the Great Fire in London.

The books came from the library of James Midgley (1786-1852) of Spring Hill, near Rochdale, who devoted much time and thought to building up his collection; they were presented in 1863 by his surviving children to Lancashire and Cheshire Quarterly Meeting. By minute of the Quarterly Meeting, the library was placed in the care of a standing committee of five Friends, three of them members of Manchester Meeting. The books were to be perused at the premises in Mount Street, and not taken therefrom except by authority of two members of the committee in writing.

In one sense the field of the library was restricted. The report to the Quarterly Meeting in 1864 includes the following observations made by the committee, noting that the collection

consists chiefly of *rare* works, and hence many of the writings of Friends which are commonly found in other libraries, are not included in this. It does not contain, for instance, the collected works of Richard Claridge, Edward Burrough, William Penn, Robert Barclay and Isaac Penington, the writings and travels of Richard Davies, William Dewsbury and John Grattan, the *Journal* and *Epistles* of George Fox, Sewell's *History*, Besse's *Sufferings* and other standard works.

The report continues:

It can therefore only be considered as the nucleus of a good reference library, to which it is to be hoped that other standard works may, ere long, be attracted.

Unfortunately, this does not seem to have happened, and the standard historical and bibliographical works (which the Quaker historian must use) were not provided at Mount Street. In authorizing the removal made this year, the Quarterly Meeting recognized the value of having the whole resources of a great library available to the user of the collection if it were offered on loan to the John Rylands Library. Moreover the John Rylands Library already possessed many standard Quaker historical items, and the Midgley books would be a useful supplement to them.

The printed catalogue of the library, issued in 1866, is in three parts: Inventory of the bound volumes of tracts (to p. 42); List of the individual volumes, mostly (but not all) in alphabetical order of author (pages 42-52); and Index of authors' names, with references to pages on which any of their works appear. The catalogue is not entirely free from blemishes, and unfortunately the Index of authors' names is one in which names are followed by many page references, some of them having more than one item by the author on the page, and no indication of the titles of the works referred to.

Apart from the abiding value of the books and pamphlets themselves as source material in the study of all aspects of seventeenth-century Quaker growth, thought and controversy, a further interest lies in the associations which the volumes in the collection built by James Midgley have. Five of the bound volumes of tracts (nos. 26, 35, 25, 39 and 40) come direct from the collection of George De Horne, who between the 1670s and 1712 made a remarkable library of 211 early Quaker pamphlets and had them bound in six fat quarto volumes, each prefaced with a manuscript contents-list and paged throughout in manuscript. Volumes 3 and 4 of De Horne's collection do not appear to be present, but it is possible that they were broken up and rebound by William Midgley or James Midgley or some intermediate owner.

None of the other books seem to have come from any large collection in a block, but the interest revealed by the inscriptions is various. There are signatures of Wilson Birkbeck in the Baskerville Barclay's *Apology* (1765), of Gilbert Molleson (1668), John Overend (1665), Sir John Rodes of Balber Hall (1706), Thomas Shillitoe, and the inscription of Lord Charles Noel Somerset (1725). "James Harison," who signed *The Innocent Assemblies* (1669, no. 20, xx), may possibly be the James Harrison (c. 1628-87) shoemaker, who emigrated in 1682 to Pennsylvania and became Penn's first steward at Pennsbury.

Thomas Speed (d. 1703) was owner of *The Popish Informer Reprehended* (1673, no. 20, xiv). He was one of the foremost Bristol Friends, a merchant, member of the Corporation of New England, who married the widow of a former sheriff of Bristol who had been hanged in 1643 for plotting to open the city gates to let in the besieging forces of Prince Rupert. Towards the end of his life, Speed became a most influential

Friend politically, and cemented in Bristol the nonconformist-Whig alliance which continued for many decades.

Mary Prince owned William Dewsbury's *The Word of the Lord* (1665, no. 33, ix). Mary Prince travelled in the ministry as far afield as New England in the West and Venice and the eastern Mediterranean in the East. In 1656 she was taken up at Boston and sent out of the province. Next year she was back in England, preparing to sail to the Mediterranean with Mary Fisher. They were at Venice later on, and again on the continent in 1660. Mary Prince was among the Friends who signed the marriage certificate of George Fox and Margaret Fell in 1669, and she died, a widow, ten years later. It is a source of satisfaction to the modern student to read and use the very copies which early Friends possessed; works which must have given them some of their inspiration and confirmed them in their faith.

John Whiting, the first Quaker bibliographer, whose *Catalogue* (1708, no. 154) James Midgley knew well, is represented in the library by his own publications and by two books he owned. These latter are, George Keith's *The Light of the Glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ* (1671, no. 132), and *Quakerism Confirmed* by Robert Barclay and Aberdeen Friends (1676, no. 136). It is interesting to note that Whiting changed his practice in spelling his name between 1680 and 1683. In the first book he signed "John Whiteing," but in the second he dropped the "e." Whiting was in jail from 1681 for some years, and we can perhaps think of him in the little prison at Ilchester reading these pages and sharing with his Quaker fellow prisoners the same tracts which now stand safely on the shelves in busy Manchester.

Perhaps the outstanding individual volume in the collection is *A Battle-door for Teachers and Professors to learn Singular and Plural*, by George Fox, John Stubbs and Benjamin Furly (1660, no. 57). The book aimed to prove that all grammatical principles in ancient and modern languages required singular address to one person. Fox mentions it in his *Journal*: Friends presented copies to the universities, to the privy council, to the archbishop of Canterbury and other high dignitaries in church and state; "it so confounded people that few after were so rugged against us for saying 'thee' and 'thou' to a single person." (*Journal*, ed. Nickalls, p. 416.) The work is now a collector's piece—the pages set out in the

form of a battle-door, and the many different languages, all give this most unusual book a value outside its purely linguistic aim.

The tracts of the Commonwealth period are the outstanding group in the library, and among these are some rare anti-Quaker items. For instance, there is George Emmot's *Northern Blast, or the Spiritual Quaker Converted*, issued at York in 1655 (no. 1, iv). This does not appear in Joseph Smith's *Catalogue*. There is a volume of Isaac Penington's pre-Quaker publications, dating from 1648 (no. 56). At the end of James Nayler's *Milk for Babes, and Meat for Strong Men* (1661, no. 19, x) there is a leaf with one of the early printings of his "dying saying" commencing "There is a spirit . . ." Apart from the bound pamphlets there is a remarkable run of Barclay's *Apology*, commencing with the Latin edition of 1676, continuing with more than a dozen English editions, from the first, 1678, until 1841, and including the Baskerville 1765 edition with the errata.

This collection, the fruit of James Midgley's work and the generosity of his family in the middle of last century, contains much valuable material. It can provide much of the printed work required by the student of early Quaker history, and it is hoped that its new home will see the library increasingly used in research.¹

R.S.M.

Periodicals Exchanged

Receipt of the following periodicals is gratefully acknowledged:

Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association (Philadelphia).

Institute of Historical Research, *Bulletin*.

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

Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography.

Presbyterian Historical Society, *Proceedings*.

Unitarian Historical Society, *Transactions*.

Wesley Historical Society, *Proceedings*.

William and Mary Quarterly

¹ See the note in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, vol. 37, no. 2, p. 361 (March 1955).