

The Quakers Dublin Weekly Oracle, 1721

A *hand-list of Irish newspapers, 1685-1750*, by R. L. Munter (Cambridge Bibliographical Society. Monograph 4. London, Bowes, 1960), includes an entry for a paper which the compiler was unable to identify and which has apparently not been recorded elsewhere. The item (no. 78, on page 14) reads as follows:

? The [Quakers] Dublin-Weekly-Oracle. ?-[November? 1721]-?
(Sole reference from *The Dublin Courant*, entry 66, 4 and 7 November 1721, commenting on the late content of the ' . . . Quakers Dublin-Weekly-Oracle . . . ', a suspect title and doubtful entry.) Printer unknown. No copies traced.

The reference to *The Dublin Courant* (checked from the Microfilm positive 1903 in the National Library of Ireland) reveals the following paragraph, seemingly inserted as an advertisement in three consecutive issues¹ of the newspaper reproduced on the film:

Whereas the Scribling Author of the Quakers Dublin-Weekly-Oracle (falsly so called) having lately under his own Hand to some of us the said People confessed himself recorded amongst us for an Apostate, &c. ever since the year 1682, the Truth of which we are obliged thus to certifie, in Order to undeceive the Publick, and manifest his Character, who like an old Apostate has already in his said Oracle publish'd several Untruths, sundry Perversions, gross Reflections, and malicious Insinuations. As also, in a Paper cried out lately, for the Quakers Speech to the Lord Lieutenant, are some Things omitted, others added, and certain notorious Falshoods annexed: All which mercenary Clamours together with the Author or Authors are in our Esteem unworthy of any farther Notice.

Reference to the manuscript index by John Douglas to the Anthony Sharp manuscripts at Friends' Historical Library, 6 Eustace Street, Dublin, shows a paper headed "The Quakers Dublin Weekly Oracle" as Sharp MS. S.14, which consists of two conjugate folio leaves, headed as above and containing the answers to three questions. As it stands the manuscript is incomplete, a catchword for Query 4 appearing

¹ Olive Goodbody has kindly consulted the originals in the Gilbert Collection, Dublin Public Library, and found the paragraph in nos. 570-572 (Nov. 4, 7 and 11, 1721) of *The Dublin Courant*.

at the foot of the final page at the end of the answer to the third question. The questions are:

1. How long is it Since ye Quakers first apeared in ye World. . . (Answer = 1652.)
2. Who was ye first instrument in y^t Work. (Answer = George Fox.)
3. Do ye Quakers ever Lament Mourn or Weep For ye loss off any Brother or Sister that upon full convictions Leaves their Meetings and joynes in Communion with ye Church of England or any other Christian church &c. (Answer quotes the case of George Keith and Philadelphia Friends.)

The manuscript is in the hand of John Crabb (brother of Ann Crabb the second wife of Anthony Sharp), who was disowned in 1682 (Dublin Men's Meeting minute, 6.iv.1682),¹ a fact which confirms the printed statement in the *Dublin Courant*, and which marks him as the author of the numbers of the Oracle which did appear. Although no copies of the printed newspaper have been traced, it seems likely that the Dublin Friends who took the step of advertising their displeasure with the publication would not have printed their disclaimer unless John Crabb had first printed his work for circulation.

It is to John Crabb that we are indebted for the manuscripts of Anthony Sharp which are preserved in the Friends' Historical Library at Dublin, and the three letters from Crabb to Dublin Friends (S.15-17) which follow this manuscript of the Oracle (S.14) allow the probable course of events leading to the publication of the printed newspaper to be traced.

The first letter (S.15, dated May ye 9th 1720) is one in which Crabb proposed to print the life and writings of Anthony Sharp. The proposal came before Dublin Men's Meeting, 23.vi. & 6.vii.1720, and a committee was appointed to get the papers from Crabb and to read them. The committee's report was unfavourable, but the Men's Meeting of 7.xii.1720 (Feb. 1721) did take steps to secure the preservation of the manuscripts, authorizing Friends to get in all the writings and to pay Crabb not more than £5 for the care and expense he had been at in arranging and preserving them. The money was paid on delivery of the papers, which were lodged in a "Chest above stairs with other of friends writings".

¹ The actual testimony of disownment against John Crabb was not signed until the Men's Meeting of September 1682. (Information from Olive Goodbody.)

In view of what was to happen it is interesting to see in John Crabb's original letter, the sentence: "I shall take care not to publish any thing of that nature, without acquainting your meeting."

These matters seem to have rested for half a year, until July 25th, 1721, when Crabb again wrote to the Men's Meeting. In this second letter (S.16) he recited his care in collecting Anthony Sharp's manuscripts and other epistles of Friends, and complained that he had received payment for nothing more than a portion of the cost he had been at in transcribing and arranging them. He said he had made proposals to some Friends of the Meeting "for my own Ease & ye Meetings Satisfaction," and desired an answer.

A fortnight later a third letter followed (S.17, dated August 8, 1721, addressed to Samuel Fuller, in Meath Street).

Friend Sammuell Fuller,
this day, please to give, this into ye Mens Meeting . . .

John Crabb asked the Meeting not to despise this letter, as they did the last.

. . . For this Work y^t I have begun is For publick service; which if Frds have no just exceptions to make against, i shall proceed to publish ye small begining in a few Dayes, & please God give Me life & Bless my Endeavours i shall Farther proceed till it swell itself into a Vollum For ye Service off ye present & succeeding generations.

It would seem that the Men's Meeting made no reply to these last two letters, for no minute was made on the subject, and that John Crabb, some time between the beginning of August and the end of October 1721, proceeded to print one or more numbers of his Quakers Dublin-Weekly-Oracle and received the unsigned printed rebuke in the November issues of *The Dublin Courant*. The manuscript copy of what must have been the first number of the Oracle, now Sharp MS. S.14, is evidently the "small begining" mentioned in the third letter (S.17), but whether it was an enclosure with that letter or was received with the "proposals" which Crabb had made (mentioned in S.16) cannot be determined.

* * *

As a tail-piece to the foregoing enquiry it may be noted that the second paper disclaimed by Friends in their

advertisement printed in *The Dublin Courant*, apparently entitled "The Quakers Speech to the Lord Lieutenant," must have had a basis in fact even if the editor or printer had tampered with the text. The evidence is to be found in the minutes of Dublin Men's Meeting, 5.vii.1721:

The Duke of Grafton being come over Ld: Lieut: Genl: & Governour of this Nation, this Meeting desires that Geo: Rooke, Joseph Gill, Timothy Forbes, Saml: Braithwait, John Barclay and John Stoddart do Endeavour to wait upon him at a Suitable time to morrow. Supposed ye 12th hour.

The following note is made of the action which Friends took on that minute:

Friends were with the Ld: Lieut: & G: Rooke spoke on behalf of friends wch: was well accepted & a kind answer returned by the Ld: Lieut:

R.S.M.

Reports on Archives

The National Register of Archives (Historical Manuscripts Commission) *List of accessions to repositories in 1959 (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1960)*, reports the following additions to the manuscript collections in various institutions which may interest workers on Quaker history.

Birmingham University Library, Edgbaston, Birmingham, 15.
Margaret Fell: "Second call unto the seed of Israel," and "Epistle to those whose desires are after the truth" (1659).

British Museum, Department of Manuscripts. London, W.C.1.
Joseph Sturge: further correspondence with Richard Cobden, 1839-53 (presented with Add. MSS 43722-43723 in 1934 and now incorporated). (Add. MS 50131).

Cambridgeshire Record Office, Shire Hall, Castle Hill, Cambridge.
Society of Friends: records of quarterly and monthly meetings for Cambs. and Hunts., mid 17th-20th cent., incl. printed 18th cent. pamphlets.

Essex Record Office, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex.
Commonplace book of Robert Greenwood of Chelmsford, quaker, c.1800.

Herefordshire County Record Office, Shirehall, Hereford.
Society of Friends: Herefordshire and Radnorshire monthly meetings: minutes, sufferings, school records, etc., from 1692.

Hertfordshire Record Office, County Hall, Hertford.
Map: Port Hill (Hertford) Quaker burial ground, 1855.