

Tracing the Influence of Sebastian Franck

THE discovery some years ago that George Fox's personal library included an English translation of a pseudonymous writing of the German mystic Sebastian Franck (1499–c.1542)¹ seemed to justify the attention Rufus Jones had called to Franck as a forerunner of Quakerism.² Franck's influence is hard to trace, but it was widely spread, not only in German speaking circles but through translations in other areas. Some indication of his influence is shown by the present day evidence of his writings and their circulation.

It is therefore a useful task to identify as far as possible, books written by him anonymously or pseudonymously. And this task is currently in progress by Irvin B. Horst, University of Amsterdam. The *Short-title catalogue (S.T.C.)* and Wing mention only the 1640 and 1642 editions of the item in Fox's list and locate only two and three copies respectively. Horst refers to a published finding list of Franck items in American libraries (twenty-two items in all), to an unpublished list of copies recorded in most libraries located in German-speaking countries, and to his own work collecting data from English, Dutch, Polish and Russian libraries. What he says about the difficulties in dealing with Franck applies to other heretical writings whether near Quaker, Quaker, or otherwise and may be worth quoting here. He says³

“The unusual problems encountered in connection with a Franck bibliography are in general those which arise in relation to an author long considered heretical. Franck's works were severely condemned in both Roman Catholic and Protestant countries. Some works are lost but likely not very many, considering the reprints of most of his works. The pseudonyms employed by Franck are now pretty well established. More difficult is the identification of anonymous works, and much speculation occurs

¹ *J.F.H.S.* xxviii, 8, 18. cf. xxx, 12, *The Forbidden Fruit*, Augustine Eleutherius.

² *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, 1914, Chapter IV and indexes to that and to *Studies in Mystical Religion*, 1909, and *Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth*, 1932.

³ American Philosophical Society, *Year Book*, 1968, p. 596.

in secondary works about Franck. Evidently he wrote and compiled many of the anonymous works which were printed on his own press at Ulm. In some of his books the imprint is suppressed, a feature of many heretical books of the sixteenth century. It appears that Franck on a number of occasions avoided the censor by having his books printed at one town—sometimes on his own press—but having them published at another.”

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