

HUMPHREY NORTON'S 1656 VISIT TO IRELAND

In his *The Beginnings of Quakerism* W.C. Braithwaite devotes a number of pages to the origins of Irish Quakerism – describing the work of James Lancaster, Miles Halhead, Miles Bateman, John Tifflin, and Richard Clayton in 1654 and the visits of Edward Burrough, Francis Howgill, Thomas Loe, Richard Hickock, Elizabeth Morgan, James Lancaster, Rebecca Ward and Barbara Blaughdone in 1655–1656.¹ There is, however, no mention of Humphrey Norton's 1656 labours in Ireland. The same thing is true of both Isabel Grubb's *Quakers in Ireland, 1654–1900*² and Besse's *Sufferings*³ (although Wight does mention Norton in one place).⁴

Norton's 1656 visit to Ireland was really called forth by the earlier activities of the people mentioned above – especially by the labours of Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill. Some of the activities of these early 'Publishers of Truth' had been in Ulster, while others had toiled in the Dublin area. With the coming of Howgill and Burrough, however, the Quaker missionary activity spread rapidly into the south and southwest. Howgill, at the instigation of an officer in the Cromwellian Army, moved southwestward from Dublin towards Cork, Bandon Bridge, and other towns in that direction.⁵ Edward Burrough, upon completing his labours in Dublin, travelled southward to the Waterford area where he had great success.⁶ Among his more significant convincements were William Ames (who soon became the Quaker 'apostle' to Holland),⁷ John Perrot (who was to become a famous Quaker schismatic),⁸ and Samuel Buckley. While still at work in Waterford, Burrough received a letter from his old yoke-fellow Howgill, requesting that Burrough join him in Cork "with speed".⁹ Not long after Burrough's arrival in Cork, Howgill and Burrough were arrested, taken to Dublin, and finally banished from Ireland about the beginning of March 1656.¹⁰

Samuel Buckley, who may have been from Brownsford, County Kilkenny (and probably related to the John Buckley who travelled to Turkey with Mary Fisher, John Perrot and three other Friends in 1657), was the catalyst who helped bring about Humphrey Norton's visit to Ireland. Towards the end of March ('the seventh day of the 4th week in the first month') 1656 Samuel Buckley was on the road from

Brownsford to Waterford early in the morning, only two miles away from his home, when he had some sort of religious experience which he recorded as follows:

I was moved powerfully, and tears gushed from me apace, I stood still, and the Word of the Lord came unto me saying, goe into England – goe into England, and there be faithfull in this message, and this shalt thou say: E[dward] B[urrough] to thee I am Sent, whom I witnesse a Seale of thy ministry wrought, and thou hast turned many from Darknesse to Light, Thou art heerby Required to Come in thy Selfe, or labour the sending away Speedily a faithfull messenger to declare the word of god in Waterford, unto a people who are tender and young, w[hi]ch people are as sheepe without a sheeheard, scattered on the Mountaine, and in a lost Condition, if not speedily relieved; therefore haste, haste, by Command from the powerfull god thou are not to fayle, Witnessed by him who is sent not of his owne will, but in obedience to the Command. A little while after this word Came unto me (about a Quarter of an houre or neere about that time as I Judged) William Aymes (who is bound for Holland) met me up on the Way, going towards my house, who saw me draw neere to him towards my Journey to Waterford, He demanded of me where I was going, I answered to Waterford. He said, thou art the Man, that is appointed to goe with me for England. At that word I wonderfully considered, and Said unto him, a Command came unto me, goe, Upon his word to me, I bid him read what I had Writt upon the Way, shewing him what came to me not long before, w[hi]ch word of his to me, Confirmed my first Command, who am appointed to goe, this paper to deliver.”¹¹

It is not known just when Buckley and Ames arrived in England or when Buckley made known to Edward Burrough this summons to go to Ireland. Burrough felt unable to make the journey himself, but he had found some other ‘Publisher of Truth’ who had been ‘called’ by God to this task. This was Humphrey Norton ‘my deare Brother, and faithful companion in the Kingdom of God’¹² Edward Burrough wrote to Friends in Ireland, on the 19th of 3rd Month [May], 1656, of his decision to send Norton.¹³ Francis Howgill also wrote a brief note to accompany Burrough’s letter, calling upon Irish Friends to

Receive Humphrey Norton in the Lord, w[ho]m the Lord hath moved to come unto you, who is a brother, faithful in the Lord’s work, and be subject [to] him in the Lord, all unto him; for I much desired that he might come unto you, & so the Lord hath ordered it, & as you receive him you receive me.¹⁴

Norton, who had been active in Essex and London earlier,¹⁵ appears to have gone to Ireland almost immediately, for late in the third month [May] Edward Burrough wrote to Thomas Willan that Humphrey Norton ‘is going for Ireland’.¹⁶ A short time later, perhaps at the very end of May or early June, Francis Howgill wrote to Margaret Fell that

Humphrey Norton, with some others, had gone to Ireland and that Truth 'prosper' there.¹⁷ In all probability the 'others' who went over with Norton included William Shaw and John Stubbs (and perhaps Thomas Shaw, William's brother).

Just where Humphrey Norton began his work in Ireland is unknown. It would seem likely that Dublin or Cork would have been among his first stops,¹⁸ but there is no extant material that locates him in either of those places during the late spring and early summer of 1656. By August, however, Norton was at work in Limerick, where on the 9th of the 6th Month he wrote a paper directed 'To all priests, people professors in the world who are not come to know the true light'. In this address he insisted that

[you] who are not come to know the true light, which lighteth every one which cometh unto the world, you are not come to know the first principles of the oracles of God, you must all cease from teaching others untill you know the first principle to teach you, & by it to be taught to deny yourselves, & the world, & all the customes, & fashions & vanities of it, which are vain, & learn to put of[f] the old wisdom, nature, & its lusts, & so through the crosse to your wills, to put on the new, for he came to take away the first that he might establish the second, for those that are [away] from the light, can not see what is to be put of[f], & taken away, for the light makes manifest all priests & professors, who walk in darkness, & are preachers for the prince of darkness, such lives in sin & saith that people cannot be free from sin while they are upon earth, & such pleads for the kingdome of sin, and that is not the Kingdom of Christ, neither can any lives in sin bring any to Christ's Kingdome in which is noe sin, neither can any covetous person, & swearer, lyar, or drunkard, convert or turne any from these things before mentioned for such were never sent of God, mark, & the devill never sent any to turne people from himselfe, that of God in all your consciences is my witness.¹⁹

It seems quite clear that, in this paper, Norton was proclaiming the same message that he preached throughout Ireland. In the above passage he called people to open themselves to the Light – to let God speak to them before they then began to speak to others. He then reminded his readers that God, over the ages, 'sent holy men, & they spoke as they were moved by the holy ghost, & they preached to the holy thing, & brought people to know the holy call, which calls to holyness in all manner of conversation'. Moses, Ezekiel, John of Patmos and Paul had freely given what the Lord had freely made known to them. But their example has not been followed by the 'priests' and 'professors' who are 'swearers, lyars, and drunkards' who do not live in accordance with scripture but walk contrary to it:

herein the world is found walking contrary to that which they call their rule, &

soe are unruly, neither knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God, for Christ Jesus is the light & power unto Salvation, all Comeing to learn of him, & following him, he will show them the stranger, hireling & theife, which steals Moses & the prophets words, & that which was written to the churches and sells them, not regarding the Lords charge to his [servants], that what they receive freely they should freely give, but the teachers of the world doth not soe, shewing themselves to be none of his, & the people of the world who buyes them & goeth day after day & heareth them, they also walk contrary to the scriptures as before mentioned, in pride, in covetousness, & excesse of riot, as does their leaders, & herein is the Scriptures fulfilled, the leaders of this people causeth them to erre, & they that are led of them are destroyed Isa 9.16 & 3.12; Jer 23.32.

A new situation has come into being, however, as God has poured out his spirit once more, calling forth the 'Publishers of Truth':

holy men hath he now sent forth, who preaches & offers holy things to the people freely, as they receive freely from the Lord, as Moses did;... therefore as you love your soules take warning, & follow them [the evil ones] noe longer, but minde the light to stand in awe & sin not, & to know the teachings of God who is a Spirit, & the worship of God which is in spirit, & the minde & will of God which is knowne in Spirit, & for this one end hath he chosen us & sent us forth to direct the minds to Christ Jesus the true light, that you shall need noe longer saying know the Lord, but with us who are by the world scornfully called Quakers chosen us [sic], as we have received we declare freely.²⁰

Norton also visited Galway, in the west of Ireland, probably just before or just after his work in Limerick. Both he and William Shaw, along with some others, were 'in a peaceable meeting' at Samuel Newton's house in Galway, when the meeting was broken up by a 'guard of souldiers' who (by the order of Colonel Sadler, the governor) violently dragged them out of the meeting, 'turned them out of the city, and would not suffer them to go in for their horses'.²¹ Norton and Shaw must have been among the very first Publishers of Truth to reach Galway, where a sizable meeting developed, often having 100 soldiers or more in attendance in 1657.²²

We also have some information concerning Humphrey Norton's work in Wexford in the southeast, so that we know that he was active there at the beginning of Autumn. On the 22nd of the 7th Month [September] Norton, who had been deeply troubled by two tragic events of 1656 – the prison death of young James Parnell in April and James Nayler's 'fall' which began in the late summer and culminated in his 'messianic' entrance into Bristol in October²³ – had the 'word of the Lord' come to him about the fourth or fifth hour in the morning:

[The Lord said] I suffered James Parnell & enabled him by the power of my spirit

to seal my testimony in faithfulness unto you all for an example: & now have I suffered Satan to lay his hand upon my Servant J[ames] N[aylor] to touch him for all the examples, who are in the least measure ministers of my Spirit, that you abuse not the liberty & freedome which I have brought you into, having plenty beware of lust, having liberty beware of lightness and looseness in behaviour, but all be convinced [?] that your lives & Conversations be coupled with the power of holiness, that a chast[e], a modest, a grave, & comely conversation be by you all preached forth, & this cloud (under which some have been ready with him to cry out "my God, my God look upon me; why has thou forsaken me") shall be removed & eye opened shall see & confesse him to be the son of God. I warne you that this Epistle be read & spread among the servants of God, and that not any abide longer in a place than their testimony is finished, when the Lord calls away.²⁴

While in Wexford Humphrey Norton (along with William Shaw) became engaged in a dispute with Thomas Larkham, a minister. Out of this debate came a publication *To All People that Speakes of An Outward Baptism*, with pages 1–8 written by Norton and Shaw while pages 9–16 are by Norton alone.²⁵ The primary purpose of this work seems to have been to turn others – especially Baptists – to Quaker positions on baptism, an unpaid ministry, etc. This contest between Norton and Shaw on one hand and Larkham on the other was undoubtedly the reason why Norton and Shaw were taken from a 'peaceable meeting' at Wexford 'by a Lieutenant and a guard of Souldiers... and by force brought into the Steeple-house, and thence committed to gaol by Lieutenant Col. Bret until the next Assizes.'²⁶

There are no specific references to Norton's work in Waterford, Youghal, Cork, Kinsale, Kilkenny, Bandon and Dublin, even though he must have been active in each of these areas. Not only did Edward Burrough address his letter (announcing the coming of Norton) to Friends in those places, but Norton himself also wrote letters to Quakers in those towns after his departure from Ireland.²⁷ Also, shortly after their return to England, Norton and Shaw (along with John Perrot who had recently left Waterford for London) wrote to William and Margaret Blanch, mainstays of the Waterford Meeting.²⁸ In 11th Month 1656 [January 1657] Samuel Buckley wrote to Margaret Fell that 'Humphrey Norton a true servant of the Lord is very servisable heare, whose testymony with the rest is received in many places where he goes.'²⁹

Sometime after Norton's arrival in Ireland, he received a very sharpe rebuke from Margaret Fell in a letter addressed to him 'in Ireland'. In April 1656 Humphrey Norton had written to George Fox (and James Nayler) that he had recently been at Swarthmore where the meeting was marked by 'many speakers & prayers & singinge as the like I have not

heard & likewise a leightness amongst them which I saw & did beare & it lay upon me to lay it before the[e] and J[ames] N[ayler]'.³⁰ Margaret now wrote to Norton that she had learned of his information to Fox and Nayler the previous day. She said that Norton could have saved himself the trouble, for Fox and Nayler 'doe know us and see us and feele us in that which thou wanted to judge them'. Since that meeting Margaret had received several letters from Nayler and Fox and they did not mention the matter. Norton's charge that he saw a certain 'lightness' at Swarthmore she knows to be false. Therefore she called him 'one of the false brethren' who strengthens the enemy: 'thou was not satisfied here, but would have rendered us odious in there [their] eyes who knows us better than thou doth, for thou puts us and them of Kendall together.'³¹ Her advice to Norton was that next time he was tempted to be judgmental he should be certain of the ground of what he speaks or else should remain silent. The next time that he writes to her she would like to know the basis or ground of the word 'lightness' and 'Who it was that thou saw it in'.³²

Norton, who was still labouring in Ireland in the winter of 1656–1657, returned to England by early spring, for he was in London (along with William Shaw and John Perrot) by the 10th of 2nd Month [April], 1657. At that time they warned the Blanches and other Irish Friends of the ongoing consequences of Nayler's 'fall':

The Agents of J: N: would come creeping on their Bellys to be owned, yea: Martha [Simmonds]³³ their Miserable Mother, this day hath bin [at?] us, & all her witchery & filthy Enchantment is set at Naught, they are left for Miserable Examples, unto all that feare god; Pride & Vaine glory & fleshly liberty was their overthrow.³⁴

Sometime later that spring, as Humphrey Norton was preparing to travel to New England on the 'Woodhouse'³⁵ he wrote a letter to Irish Friends which clearly expresses his deep sense of attachement to them:

What could I say of you, if I should speake, verily you are as deare to me, as my owne life, parte of it I left amongst you, and parte I Reserved, & when these two meet together, my Joy is full, to see you all meeting at the treasury. Every one offering according as god hath blest you, Oh how I rejoyce to see the poore bringing in all that they have liveing, and the Rich in grace bringing in all their abundance.³⁶

Sometime later, when Norton and his companions were just off the coast of America (and he had yet to face the whippings, banishment and branding that were to be his lot) he wrote to Irish Friends once more, on

the 27th of 5th Month [July], 1657, again demonstrating the deep feeling which he possessed for these people.

I was with you in labour, & travells, in Sufferings, in patience & afflictions & bonds, in freedoms & liberty, in Joy and peace, and with an Harmony in my heart have I rejoyced to see that stately seed which started up amongst you, nor would not, nor could not stoope to that Beastly Image which Sinfull man hath set up in his heart, I bear you record, that you are of the ancient Stock, your seed is of Abraham, your Valour & Courage from the head of Sampson [sic], your Sobriety Modesty and chastity from milde Moses, your uprightness & Integrity from the Loynes of David, your settled, Sollid & Serious life from & upon the Rock of Abel, your fruites & Beauty Strength & Moystyre from the fatt & noble Vine into which you are engrafted, Blessed are yee, yea & happy if yee abide and abound therein, friends unto god & to the Lambe, you are the first fruits in that Nation, you are the first Ripe, & first gathered,... Verily I can say it, You in that Nation which abide in gods counsell are deare unto me, Which of you can be weake & I suffer not, Which of you are in trouble, and I am not opprest, Which of you are in Anguish, and I feel not your paines?³⁷

In this, Norton's last extant letter to Irish Friends, he cannot resist the impulse to admonish them one more time so that they might remain strong in the new life which had been opened to them:

Beware of the Love of the World, & thinges of the World, which comes to nought, but in that dwell & abide which gives victory over it, & will lead you, and Establish you in another, if you give up yourselves to be led & guided by the power of his spirit which is the absolute true teacher, & None besides it. Keepe to it, and it will keepe you out of all divisions & strife, which Eates Even as a Canker where it comes; the liveing god give you a Sight of it, & Strength & Wisdome to resist it, that in the meek & quiet Spirit you may be preserved in peace & love, & unity, to lye downe with him, unto whom you are as deare as his owne Right hand.³⁸

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, second edition revised by Henry J. Cadbury (Cambridge, 1955), 210–223.
- ² Isabel Grubb, *Quakers in Ireland, 1654–1900* (London, 1927).
- ³ Joseph Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers* (London, 1753).
- ⁴ Thomas Wight, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the People called Quakers in Ireland, 1653–1700...* [with] *A Continuation... to 1751* by John Ruty (Dublin, 1751).
- ⁵ Kenneth L. Carroll, 'Quakerism and the Cromwellian Army in Ireland,' *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, LIV (1976–1982), 135–154.
- ⁶ Braithwaite, *Beginnings*, 212–214.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.
- ⁸ Kenneth L. Carroll, *John Perrot, Early Quaker Schismatic* (London, 1971), issued as Supplement 33 to *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society*.
- ⁹ A.R. Barclay MSS LXV (Friends House Library, London).
- ¹⁰ Braithwaite, *Beginnings*, 217
- ¹¹ Swarthmore MSS VI, 33 (Tr. VII, 541).
- ¹² *Ibid.*, VI, 34 (Tr. VII, 543).
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, VI, 34 (Tr. VII, 543). This letter is addressed to Friends in Cork, Kinsale, Bandon, Youghal, Waterford, Kilkenny and Dublin, places where Burrough and Howgill had laboured earlier.
- ¹⁴ Manuscripts, Portfolio 33, item 126 (Friends House Library, London). This is another copy of Burrough's letter already cited in the preceding note, but it carries at the end Howgill's addition (which is missing in the Swarthmore MSS copy).
- ¹⁵ Swarthmore MSS I, 350 (Tr. II, 589); Norman Penny, *The First Publishers of Truth* (London, 1907), 97.
- ¹⁶ Swarthmore MSS I, 274 (Tr. III, 695).
- ¹⁷ Caton MSS III, 71 (Friends House Library, London).
- ¹⁸ Is there some significance to the order of meetings listed in note 13?
- ¹⁹ Manuscripts, Portfolio 33, item 69.
- ²⁰ Manuscripts, Portfolio 33, item 69.
- ²¹ *To the Parliament of England, Who are in place to do Justice, & to break the Bonds of the Oppressed. A Narrative of the Cruel, and Unjust Sufferings of the People of God in the Nation of Ireland, Called Quakers* (London, 1659), 7; National Sufferings, I, (1655–1693), 7. This manuscript volume is found in Friends Historical Library, Dublin.
- ²² Lansdowne MSS 822, f. 246 (British Library, London), Shaw and John Stubbs were in Galway at the very end of 1656 also [Cf. National Sufferings, I, 10; Swarthmore MSS I, 392 (Tr. I, 177)].
- ²³ Braithwaite, *Beginnings*, 188–193; 244–273.
- ²⁴ Manuscripts, Portfolio 33, item 113.
- ²⁵ Humphrey Norton, *To All People that Speaks of An Outward Baptism; Dippers, Sprinklers and Others* (n.p., n.d.).
- ²⁶ *To the Parliament of England, Who are in place to do Justice*, 8.
- ²⁷ Swarthmore MSS VI, 34 (Tr. VII, 543); VI, 22 (Tr. VII, 509).
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, V. 25 (Tr. VII, 125).
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 392 (Tr. I, 277). Buckley, who reports that John Stubbs and William Shaw are 'in outward bonds at Gallyway [Galway], the people some of them are tender over them', wrote to Margaret Fell that "the work heare is great" and that more labourers "in this wild wilderness" would be gladly received, for "the work of the lord heare doth prosper" .

- ³⁰ George Fox (Norman Penny, ed.), *The Journal of George Fox* (Cambridge, 1911), I, 246. Concerning singing in meeting, cf. Kenneth L. Carroll, 'Singing in the Spirit in Early Quakerism'. *Quaker History*, LXXIII (1984), 1-13.
- ³¹ Spence MSS III, 41 (Friends House Library, London). Concerning the developments at Kendal, cf. Braithwaite, *Beginnings*, 237.
- ³² Spence MSS III, 41. She adds that, if Norton happens to be in Waterford, he should tell Friends there that she has recently heard from William Ames in Holland and 'he is well and truth prospers there.'
- ³³ Cf. Kenneth L. Carroll, 'Martha Simmonds, a Quaker Enigma,' *Journal of Friends Historical Society*, LIII (1972-1975), 31-52.
- ³⁴ Swarthmore MSS V, 25 (Tr. VII, 125).
- ³⁵ Rufus M. Jones, *Quakers in the American Colonies* (London, 1923), 45-51.
- ³⁶ Swarthmore MSS VI, 22 (Tr. VII, 509).
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, VI, 41 (Tr. VII, 573).
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, VI, 41 (Tr. VII, 573).