

# Letter from Richard Hubberthorne concerning George Fox and James Nayler

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THE publication of the life-history of James Nayler, written by Mabel R. Brailsford, has aroused interest in the attitude of George Fox and others towards their erring friend. The following is from the pen of Elisabeth Brockbank, of Yealand Conyers, Carnforth, Lancashire, author of the life of Richard Hubberthorne recently published.

THE following letter throws important light on the infinite pains taken by George Fox in dealing with James Nayler and trying to restrain him and win him back. It has recently been stated that Fox was hard and overbearing towards his erring friend.<sup>1</sup> Hubberthorne's account (that of an eye-witness be it remembered), with its wealth of detail, gives a different impression.

Newly released from imprisonment in Launceston Gaol, part of the time in the horrors of the foul dungeon of Doomsdale, Fox travelled up to Exeter almost immediately to see Nayler. He came into the town on the Saturday and visited him the same evening. On the Sunday he, Hubberthorne and others, had a meeting in the gaol at which Nayler was present, but Nayler left, with his followers, before the end and behaved rudely. During the following days Fox was with him repeatedly, some eight times in all, and, in between, left Hubberthorne quietly to continue the loving persuasion. Not without result, for Nayler "was brockne & tender and wept," but was strange in manner, offering Fox an apple. The next day Fox sent for him privately, but he had changed, and would not come. Fox and Hubberthorne went to seek him in the prison, but he had

<sup>1</sup> *A Quaker from Cromwell's Army: James Nayler*, by Mabel R. Brailsford, pp. 112, 113.

gone out. Fox followed, and found him in the street. He was noisy and abusive, so Fox left Hubberthorne again to try persuasion, and later Fox rejoined them in the prison. Hubberthorne gives a most careful account of an incident entirely misrepresented in the book named, where the author says :

Almost before he had crossed the threshold Nayler hurried forward to kiss him. Fox's sense of injury, however, was not to be so lightly appeased ; he drew back—even, with his characteristic love of symbols, offered Nayler his foot to kiss, as the gesture of abasement 'suitable to his condition.'<sup>2</sup>

Fox is represented as saying this in the first and only private interview that he had with Nayler, whereas in fact it was at the end of a series of conversations and much tender dealing with him. Compare the above account with Hubberthorne's description of the incident, that of an eyewitness trained in habits of exact thought and speech and accustomed to express himself clearly in writing. "Being dead he yet speaketh" to vindicate the patience of his leader.

Hubberthorne's account shows Fox reasoning again and again with an obviously unbalanced man. The childish and twice repeated offer of "an Aple," the strange, moody behaviour of Nayler, sometimes noisy, sometimes sullen, again argumentative or loving and tearful, is described in detail, and the incident of the kiss is made as clear as a picture—Nayler crouched in the low-roofed recess "where he lyes," George Fox "standinge above him in y<sup>e</sup> low place"—Nayler asking for a kiss and Fox immediately clasping his hand closer and trying to draw him out and raise him up to embrace him—James refusing, and wanting to bow Fox down, clearly with the idea in his distorted mind that Fox could then be said to bow to him. Fox, the "discerner of other men's spirits," realised the trap, and "could not bow down," but offered his hand to kiss. Nayler again refused, and surely it was with a glance half-humorous, wholly pitiful, that "Geo: said unto him: it is my footte." After a few more words the two visitors left, but later Fox returned and made one last, tender appeal. "I was set," he says, "a pattern of patience." But in vain. He felt the deluded man shut out by "a cloude of darkness." He followed up his visit by several straight letters of warning and reproof,

<sup>2</sup> *A Quaker from Cromwell's Army: James Nayler*, p. 112.

full of sorrow and wounded love. For the sake of the Society it was well that he did so, for later these letters fell into the hands of Nayler's judges and cleared Fox and Friends from all complicity in the wrong-doing.

Hubberthorne closes his letter : " This Above mentioned concerning Ja : I thought good to mention unto thee *y there by thou may beter understand his condition.*"

LETTER FROM RICHARD HUBBERTHORNE TO  
MARGARET FELL

Written from Bristol 4.8 [October]. 1656

Deare sister with whom my deare love & felowshippe remaines in y<sup>e</sup> eternall spirit. . In my last lett<sup>er</sup> I gave thee a short testimony of my passinge to G ff & beinge with him. He passed out of Cornwell upon y<sup>e</sup> 20 day of 7 month [September] came to Exiter and was there upon y<sup>e</sup> 21 day beinge y<sup>e</sup> first day of the week.

Upon y<sup>e</sup> 7 day in y<sup>e</sup> evning he was with J N : he had a meetinge in y<sup>e</sup> prisson upon the first day, & in y<sup>e</sup> meetinge, in tendernes, was made to Judge y<sup>t</sup> which was out of y<sup>e</sup> way and spoke to J. N : in perticler, which J N : could not well beare but did not opose it openly. And there beinge A man of London with J N : he y<sup>t</sup> acted these things with J N : in london & in his passage to Bristoll: he drew Ja: out of y<sup>e</sup> meeting with some few of them seperating them selves from freinds.<sup>1</sup>

Upon the 2 day in y<sup>e</sup> morninge Ja : came to G : to the Inn : and he was tender and brokene and deare love went out from G : to him, & in tendernes he spoke to him : comending his former faith full nes : from which words Ja : takes occation to Justiefie him selfe in his p̄sent condition :

After James was passed from G : to preson againe I passed up into y<sup>e</sup> prison to Ja : and in deare love & tendernes beinge with him a certaine time somethinge lay on me to have spoke to him privatly from those filthy spirits y<sup>t</sup> was about him : and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fox's *Journal*, Cambridge ed., vol. i., p. 244: " I saw hee & his company was wronge butt I did admonish y<sup>m</sup> butt Jam: Nayler & some of y<sup>m</sup> could not stay y<sup>e</sup> meetinge butt kept on there hatts when I prayde ; & they were y<sup>e</sup> first y<sup>t</sup> gave y<sup>t</sup> bad example among freindes ; soe after I had beene warring with y<sup>e</sup> world now there was a wicked spiritt risen uppe amongst freindes to warr against."

so I asked him if he was free to passe out from them : but he would not : but said I might speake it there amongst them what I had to speake : & one of y<sup>e</sup> women in her filthines spoke unto me saing I had folowed Xt for loves & now when he was upon y<sup>e</sup> crosse despised him : with more of y<sup>e</sup> like : soe after a litle time I was constrained by y<sup>e</sup> spirit to speake unto them : to lett them see what they grew unto, & what fruits they brought forth. . . .

At that p̄sent time Geo : came into the prisson : after I had spoken when we ware siting silant : & he called of Jam : three or foure times, but he would not speake to him :

Then he turned away and went out :

Geo : spoke to me y<sup>t</sup> if I was free to stay longer with them I might & that he would come againe & I stayed longer : & after a while I was moved to speake in tendernes to Ja : y<sup>t</sup> he might see whom he now was subjecte unto & whom he Rejected . . . . and after I had spokne as I was moved with love to him, Geo : came againe, and spoke some words to them all, & wee passed out of y<sup>e</sup> prison to y<sup>e</sup> Inn : and a litle after Ja : came to the Inn : and he was brokne & tender and wept and said to Geo : that there was that which could never be seperated from him : & much love & tendernes was from Geo : to him : and he offered to give Geo : an Aple but he would not Receive it : And soe with some love & tender afections he parted from us at y<sup>t</sup> time :

Upon y<sup>e</sup> same day we went in to the castle yard to wheare James was : & and there Geo : had much communication with him of things. but Ja : stood to justifie him selfe in things which was reproved with the light. . . .

Upon y<sup>e</sup> 3 day in y<sup>e</sup> morning Geo : sent for James to come to him, hee havinge somthinge to speake privatly to him which he would not have spoken in publick but he would not come soe A litle after wee went to y<sup>e</sup> prisson but he was passed out towards the castle yard, and soe was at y<sup>e</sup> castle gate : & Geo : went up to him & we stayed in y<sup>e</sup> street y<sup>t</sup> they might be privat Geo : asked him why he would not come when he sent & asked him if he would now goe thither then he said y<sup>t</sup> he had tould the jalor y<sup>t</sup> he would goe to y<sup>e</sup> castle & had not tould him of goinge to the Inn : Then Geo : asked him if he would then goe with him to tell y<sup>e</sup> jalor that he would goe to y<sup>e</sup> Inn but he would not. Soe then Geo : spoke much to him in y<sup>e</sup> street privatly, but in the end some thinge gott up in him ag<sup>t</sup>

Geo: & when Geo: was turninge a way from him he openly utered forth these words : take heed of lying & false accusings & severall in y<sup>e</sup> street heard. both prisoners & others : but Geo: passed away & would not Reply openly :

Then after wee weare passed away Geo: sent me to him againe & Edw: Piate went with me to ask him whearin he could charge him with lyinge or false accusing [Nayler would not give an answer. This part is very long drawn out in the letter.] After wards Geo: passed to him againe in to y<sup>e</sup> prison, wheare he & some others with him was sitinge in a place wheare he lyes which is lower then y<sup>e</sup> rest of y<sup>e</sup> chamber. . . . Ja: wept and proffessed a great love and againe ofered Geo: An Aple & said : If I have found faver in thy sight receive it : but he denyed it & said, If thou can say thou art moved of y<sup>e</sup> lord to give me it. Ja: said : Would thou have me to lye : Then Ja: havinge Geo: by y<sup>e</sup> hand, he asked him if he might kisse him. Geo: standinge above y<sup>e</sup> low place would have drawne Ja: out to him but he would not come out : but Geo: standinge still could not bow downe to him at his askinge of him in y<sup>t</sup> thinge which if he had come out, he could have sufered him to have done it : Then Geo: gave him his hand to kisse but he would not : and then Geo: said unto him : it is my footte. So with some few more words wee passed away, and Geo: passed up againe to him before wee went out of y<sup>e</sup> towne. . . .

Geo: is to have a generall meeting at Reding, & then passe to London, & I know nothings to y<sup>e</sup> contrary but that I may passe to London. . . .

This Above mentioned concerning Ja: I thought good to mention unto thee y<sup>t</sup> there by thou may beter understand his condition :

Thy deare Bro:

R. HUBBERTHORNE.

Bristoll y<sup>e</sup> 4 day 8 month :

Endorsed by George Fox: " r hubthorne to m ff 1656 read over—of gff to j. n. in exeter preson."

Copied from the original in **D** (Gibson MSS. v. 93).

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The subject of Fox's attitude towards Nayler will be continued.