

*This pamphlet is republished from Tait's Edinburgh Mag
of October, 1834.*

GEORGE FOX
AND
HIS FIRST DISCIPLES:
OR
THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
AS IT WAS, AND AS IT IS.

BY WILLIAM HOWITT.

ONE assertion I will venture to make, as suggested by my own experience, that there exist folios on the human understanding, and the nature of man, which would have a far juster claim to their high rank and celebrity, if, in the whole huge volume, there could be found as much fulness of heart and intellect, as bursts forth in many a simple page of George Fox.—COLERIDGE'S *Biographia Literaria*.

THE character of George Fox—the Founder of the Society of Friends—and the principles he promulgated, are more deserving of particular notice and serious inquiry, than the world has ever given them credit for. They are especially worthy of them at the present moment. It has been the custom to regard Fox as a well-enough-meaning sort of person, but at the same time an incorrigible fanatic, a man of wild and ultra notions, of singular dress and manners; in short, a fit subject of ridicule—and little more. The Society that he founded has been looked upon pretty much in the same light. It has been seen to consist of persons very peculiarly old fashioned in their dress, precise in their demeanour, reserved in their habits, devoted to trade, not devoted to public amusements, fond of the singular number in their language, but of the plural in their accounts; accumula-

ting money, and loath to spend it upon parsons; having an equal horror of fashions, fiddles and fencing masters; hating tithes, church-rates, and war-taxes; having a shrewd, dry, mode of expression and of dealing; prone to ask sly questions, but difficult to drive into a direct answer—yet, withal, discovering many traits of benevolence; strongly addicted to prison discipline, Friendly and Dorcasian Societies, and making determined war on Negro Slavery. This is as they have appeared to the eye of the world, and George Fox has had the credit of it. People have concluded that he was just such a man himself, and impressed these strong and peculiar features indelibly upon them. Few have cared to inquire further; to learn whether these obvious peculiarities were all that constituted them a Society,—whether they had not some principles, religious, moral, and civil, of greater intrinsic value.

Now, I do not mean to assert that George Fox was free from the fanaticism of his age, or the eccentricities of a sanguine temperament, acted upon by the thousand excitements of one of the most stirring and remarkable periods of English history,—far from it—he had his share of them: but these did not constitute his real character,—they merely marked it. If we regard him only as a man riding on a white horse and dressed in a suit of leather; if we fix our attention only on the facts of his having commanded a man at York to stretch forth a withered arm, and supposing that he had actually restored it; if we hear him declaring that a knowledge was given him of the medical qualities of all physical substances, and that he could cure all diseases, but did not feel himself called to it; or see him running with bare feet through the city of Litchfield, crying “Wo to the bloody city of Litchfield!” and afterwards, when the wo did not arrive, wondering for what cause he should have been

thus sent, and why the wo was denounced, and turning to the history of the place, and finding, as he might have found in others, *that some Christians had once been slain there*:—if, I say, we regard him only under these aspects, then he will appear ludicrous and fanatical enough. But these were not the bulk of his actions, nor illustrative of the main features of his mind. They were merely the spots on the sun, the foils and exceptions—the occasional extravagances of a great man under excessive excitement. Boyle, the philosopher, had great faith in “the marrow of the thigh bone of a hanged man” for the cure of certain complaints; and left the recipe among his papers. Bacon, notwithstanding the wonderful advance of his mind beyond the mind of his own age, held some notions nearly as absurd: but who measures those great men by their foibles? It would be easy to bring a ludicrous list of extravagances, follies, and eccentricities, committed by three-fourths of our martyrs and reformers; but it would be an invidious task. We have better things to estimate them by:—and, in the same manner, stripping away the outer coat of trivial absurdities from George Fox, we shall behold him one of the greatest and most noble-minded of reformers. We shall find him one of those rare characters that have but a single object in existence, and are ready to sacrifice everything for it—the establishment of Truth as the rule and the good of man: and we shall find him not more quick sighted to discover it, than bold to avow and maintain its cause. On almost all those great questions of civil and religious polity which the world is now coming to a late discussion of, he made up his mind at once, and as at one splendid leap across the broad morass of the errors and sophistries of ages. The grand discovery at which he arrived was the clear perception of the spirituality and all-sufficiency of Christianity,—that it is a law to

which we must bend all our morals, manners, and institutions, and not seek in vain to make it conform to them. His system was therefore simply the system of the New Testament, not as it is interpreted by partial interests and preconcerted creeds, but by the broad, common-sense impressions of men--the fountain of all true knowledge in politics and morals, as well as in religion--the source whence all true philosophers and originators of systems do but draw their lights, and whence historians have yet much to learn and much to teach; eventually remoulding all society, by reviewing the human annals in its spirit, and meeting all actions by its standard. The Christian system is that alone which recognises the great rights of humanity; civil and religious liberty, in its fullest extent; the casting down of all monopolies in religion, in trade, in education; the abrogation of every law, however ancient, however sanctioned by grave authorities or extended practice, which is not founded on the eternal principles of justice; and the erection of the Divine law of Love in its stead. It holds in abhorrence customs, however deemed by ages and nations to be allowable,--the customs of national bloodshed, and national force, for determining questions of right. This was his system, a system certainly of most Radical Reform,--the system of abandoning the pernicious doctrine of expedience, the authority of names and precedents,--and substituting that of "doing to others, as you would be done by;" and so far was it carried beyond the notions of that age, and even of this, that it placed women on a footing of social equality with man, and gave them, in his society, meetings of civil discipline of their own, where they transacted their own affairs of association, and learned to rely on their own intellectual and moral resources.

But before going at large into his doctrines, let us take a rapid view of his career, and his disciples.

He was born in 1624, at Drayton, in Leicestershire, and apprenticed there to a small farmer and shoemaker. To the farming he voluntarily attached himself; and as he advanced to manhood, working alone in the solitary fields, his active and sensitive mind began powerfully to turn its inquiries upon itself—upon its own nature and destiny,—what it was, why here, and whither advancing,—questions that one would imagine must vividly affect every living spirit, but which appear little to visit the multitude, and sink deep only into minds of a certain temperament. Soon satisfying himself that Christianity was the best and only guide in this inquiry—the only philosophy which can solve the great mystery of human existence,—he next was anxious to possess himself of the best means of studying it. Taught, as the bulk of the people are, and ever have been, not to depend upon their own inquiries, but to lean upon somebody in the shape of a priest, he immediately went to those who had the greatest reputation in his neighborhood. How well qualified they were to instruct such a mind as his, may be sufficiently understood from this:—the first advised him, in order to settle his spirit, “*to chew tobacco, and sing psalms.*” He went afterwards to a Dr. Cradock, of Coventry, who began to condole very sympathetically with him, till George happened to set his foot on the edge of a flower-bed, as they walked in the garden, which put the priest into a passion, “as if his house was on fire,”—and all was over. He went, therefore, to the right source at once,—the New Testament,—and studying it night and day with the deepest earnestness, often standing with it whole days in his hand in a hollow tree,—at length he saw the whole Christian system in so clear and beautiful a light, that he was not only filled with

happiness for himself, but felt it his bounden duty to go forth and proclaim it to the world. To him the gospel appeared a free gift—that every one might literally come, and receive it without money and without price,—the Bible, a book that every one might study for himself,—and that to every such sincere student, would be vouchsafed free teaching of the Eternal Spirit, and that he would be led to a perfect knowledge of the Divine will; that the great essence of Christianity was Love, and that all true Christians must, in reality, become a band of brothers. Against mercenary preaching, the vanity and pride of life, against all oppression and systematized wrong,—war, slavery, the plunder of wrecks,—he wrote to the authorities, and preached to the people, with a fiery and impetuous eloquence. How far he was qualified for this great undertaking, we may learn from a very competent judge, William Penn, who had seen human life from the palace to the cottage, and whose own honorable and capacious mind made him a fitting evidence. Penn says, George Fox was above the ordinary size, of a graceful countenance, and having an eye so piercing that many who contended with him were unable to bear it; that he had great majesty of presence, and that his addresses to the people possessed a strange and stirring power, so that whole multitudes—collected in market-places, in the open fields, under the shade of large trees, on wild heaths, sea-shores, or amongst the mountains of Wales, Scotland, and Westmoreland, and amid the forests of America, or the plantations of the West Indies—were wonderfully moved, and melted, subdued or exalted, by his grave and burning eloquence, and by the bold, simple dignity of the doctrines he taught. His system of a free gospel, and renouncement of the vanities of the world, was sure to bring upon him all the vengeance of the proud and interested; yet, in spite of this, not only

the common people, but clergy, magistrates, and officers of the army, came over to his opinions, and enrolled themselves in his new Society. No idea can be formed from the numbers or character of the Society of Friends of the present day, of the number and character of those who mustered to its formation from every quarter. Vast numbers, during the hot persecution which fell upon them, went with Penn to his settlement in America, especially from the neighborhood of Kidsley Park, in Derbyshire, a favorite resort of Fox's. Fox himself appears to have been in prison not less than a dozen times, and frequently for a long period at once, as in Lancaster and Scarborough jails, where he lay for two years—prisons of the most filthy and dreadful description, and so open to the weather, that he is said scarcely to have been dry all that time.

It is not possible, in an article of this kind, to follow his career at length. It is enough to say, that a host of able and zealous coadjutors gathered about him, whose names, labors, and singular adventures, may be found in Sewell's history of this people. For the propagation of his sentiments, George Fox, as I have already hinted, visited all parts of the kingdom, some of them many times,—and extended his travels into the West Indies, America, Germany, and Holland. He had interviews with Cromwell, in which that great and wily adventurer used all that cant slang, and dealt in those double *entendres* which he adopted towards the Puritans. "George," he would say, shaking him cordially by the hand at parting, "come often, for I feel if thou and I were often together, we should be nearer to each other."

In the presence of Protector or King, he never for a moment lost that simple dignity which distinguished him,—a Christian dignity of mind, so opposite to pride, that, while it made him feel no abjectness in

the presence of human greatness, never inspired him towards the low and the poor with any thing but the most thorough courteousness, kindness and compassion. For these he always expressed the greatest sympathy, and so organized his own Society, as to restore them to the rights and consideration of men. In the meeting-houses there was to be no place of distinction, except a railed gallery or platform in the front for the ministers, and a seat under it for the elders and overseers, that they might face the people, and preserve order. Besides this, there was to be no separate seats,—no squire's pew with its superior splendor,—no aristocratic elevations or seclusions in the house of God. All the seats were of the plainest description, and free to every one alike. The poor were to have a good English education given to their children;—and they themselves were not expected to wait till their necessities compelled them to come and receive a niggard allowance,—their needs were to be kindly, privately, and delicately inquired into by proper persons, and as unostentatiously relieved. So it was, and so it is to this day.

Penn says,—and his life shows it,—that Fox possessed, on all occasions the most undaunted courage. Though of an ardent temperament, yet he possessed such self-command as rarely, if ever, to be thrown off his guard, by insult and outrage, and he manifested the most forgiving disposition. He was simple, dignified, and manly in behaviour; grave, yet affable and pleasant in conversation; and so ready in reply, as to continually baffle his most subtle antagonists. One instance may be given:—He was imprisoned in Launceston Jail, and brought up for trial before Judge Glyn. He was ordered to take off his hat. Fox inquired what authority there was in law or Scripture for this compulsion; at which the Judge fell into a passion, and cried, “take him away, jailer; I'll ferk

him!" Soon after he sent for him again; and on seeing him, exclaimed, "come, where had they hats from Moses to Daniel? Come, answer me,---I have you fast now!" Fox immediately replied,---"The three children were ordered to be thrown into the furnace with their coats, hose, and hats on." The Judge instantly shouted,---"take him away, jailer!"

He married the widow of a Welsh Judge, (Fell,) at Swartmore, in Westmoreland; and, on this occasion, set the example of that justice to all parties which he had made the law to his own Society. He called the children of the widow together, and ascertained from themselves, that they were not only satisfied with the marriage, but that it would be no detriment to their inheritance. He died at the age of sixty-seven, having seen a large community established on his principles, and that, too, through a career of the most violent persecution,---through the imprisonment of thousands at a time, and the destruction and seizure of their property, to the amount of more than a million sterling in value.

Of his disciples, the most illustrious were Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, and Barclay, the author of the famous "Apology" for Quakerism, a gentleman of the House of Gordon, and whose patrimonial estate of Ury, in Scotland, is now in the hands of his descendant, the well known Captain Barclay. These are all I have now room to mention, except Thomas Ellwood, the friend of Milton, whose autobiography may be said to be one of the most picturesque of books, full of the character and scenes of those singular times. Let us take one scene from Newgate, in 1662:---
"When we came there, we found that side of the prison very full of Friends, as indeed were, at that time, all the other parts of that prison, and most of the prisons about town; and our addition caused a great throng on that side; notwithstanding which, we

were kindly welcomed by our Friends whom we found there, and entertained by them as well as their condition would admit. We had the liberty of the hall, which is on the first story over the gate, and which, in the day time, is common to all prisoners on that side, felons as well as others, to walk in, and beg out of; and we had also the liberty of some other rooms in the day time; but in the night, we all lodged in one room, which was large and round, having in the middle of it a great pillar of oaken timber, which bore up the chapel. To this pillar we fastened our hammocks at one end, quite round the room, and in three degrees, or three stories high, one over the other; so that they who lay in the upper and middle rows of hammocks, were obliged to go to bed first, because they were to climb up to the higher by getting into the lower. The sick and weakly persons lay in beds on the floor; and though the room was large, and pretty airy, yet the breath and steam that came from so many bodies of different ages, conditions, and constitutions, packed up so close together, was enough to cause sickness amongst us, as I believe it did. Many were sick, and one soon died.

“This caused some hustle in the house. The body was put into a coffin, and carried down into the lodge, in order that the Coroner might inquire into the manner of his death; and the manner of their doing this is thus:—As soon as the Coroner is come, the turnkeys run out into the street under the gate, and seize upon every man that passes by, till they have got enough to make up the Coroner’s Inquest; and so resolute these rude fellows are, that if any man resist or dispute it with them, they drag him in by main force, not regarding what condition he is of; nay, I have been told, they will not stick to stop a coach, and pluck the men out of it.

“It so happened that at this time, they lighted on

an ancient man, a grave citizen, who was trudging through the gate in great haste; and him they laid hold on, telling him he must come in, and serve upon the Coroner's Inquest. He pleaded hard, begged and besought them to let him go, assuring them that he was going on very urgent business, and that the stopping him would be greatly to his prejudice. But they were deaf to all entreaties, and hurried him in, the poor man chafing without remedy.

“When they had got their complement, and were shut in together, the rest of them said to this ancient man,—‘come, father, you are the oldest man among us; you shall be our foreman.’ And when the Coroner had sworn them on the jury, the coffin was uncovered, that they might look upon the body. But the old man, disturbed in his mind at the interruption they had given him, was grown somewhat fretful upon it, and said to them,—‘To what purpose do you show us a dead body here? You would not have us think, sure, that this man died in this room. How, then, shall we be able to judge how this man came by his death, unless we see the place wherein he died, and wherein he hath been kept prisoner before he died? How know we but the incommodiousness of the place wherein he was kept may have occasioned his death? Therefore show us the place wherein this man died.’

“This much displeased the keepers, and they began to baulter the man, thinking to have beaten him off it; but he stood tightly to them. ‘Come, come,’ said he, ‘though you have made a fool of me in bringing me in hither, ye shall not find a child of me now I am here. Mistake not yourselves. I understand my place, and your duty; and I require you to conduct me and my brethren to the place where this man died. Refuse it at your peril!’

“They now wished they had let the old man go

about his business, rather than by troubling him, have brought this trouble on themselves. But when they saw he was peremptory, the Coroner told them they must show him the place.

“It was evening when they began this work, and by this time it was grown bed time with us, so that we had taken down our hammocks, which, in the day, were hung up by the walls, and had made them ready to go into; and were undressing ourselves in readiness to go into them, when on a sudden we heard a great noise of tongues, and of tramplings of feet coming up towards us; and, by and by, one of the turnkeys opening our door, said—‘Hold, hold, don’t undress yourselves: here’s the Coroner’s Inquest coming to see you.’

“As soon as they were come to the door, for within door there was scarce room for them to come, the foreman, who led them, lifting up his hands, said,—‘Lord bless me, what a sight is here! I did not think there had been so much cruelty in hearts of Englishmen, to use Englishmen in this manner!’ ‘We need not now question,’ said he to the rest of the jury, ‘how this man came by his death; we may rather wonder that they are not all dead, for this place is enough to breed an infection among them.’ ‘Well,’ added he, ‘if it please God to lengthen my life till to-morrow, I will find means to let the King know how his subjects are dealt with.’” Which it appears he did, for the next day they were removed to Bridewell. The rest of the prison scenes and characters are equally curious. Honeypot, the novice pickpocket, the man who slyly slipped into prison amongst the crowd of Quakers, hoping for good living out of the general mass, and always thrust in his knife and fork first, though he paid nothing,—and the general condition and contents of Newgate at that period, furnish a grand picture for the student of man

under almost all aspects. But I must here close this sketch.

Such were Fox and his first disciples,—such was their early career. And what were the doctrines they proposed to the world? They were principally these:

1st. The influence of the Divine Spirit on the spirits of his creatures.

2d. The spirituality of Christianity; consequently the non-essentiality of ceremonies.

3d. The civil and religious freedom of all men; consequently an abhorrence of tyranny, political or ecclesiastical, in the shape of the despot or the priest.

4th. The Anti-Christianity of War.

5th. The free gift of the gospel; consequently a dislike of hirelings.

6th. The Anti-Christianity of Oaths.

7th. The contempt of fawning and flatteries, and foolish titles given to men, as inconsistent with our self-respect, our respect for truth, and as repugnant to the meek and brotherly spirit of Christianity, and degrading to our immortal and intellectual nature.

8th. The equality of the sexes,—no sex in souls, all one in Christ Jesus;—consequently elevating the female world to the highest pitch of honor, usefulness, and felicity.

9th. Simplicity and purity in language, in manners, and in dress.

I do not mean to say that these comprised all their doctrines. They held others with the Christian world in general; but these they held in contra-distinction to most of their own times. The influence of the Divine Spirit, now in some shape or other received by all denominations, was then held by some as little short of madness, and ridiculed without measure by others. The spirituality of Christianity was then as little comprehended. All reformers before them, and

the Puritans, their cotemporaries, were so little illuminated on the subject, that though they were determined not to conform to the ceremonial set up, they were all busy in framing ceremonies for themselves. Fox at once pronounced ceremonies and externals to be the beggarly elements of Christianity,—its essence, a renewed vitality of mind. So far, indeed, did he outgo the ordinary grasp of public opinion, that at this day the Christian world has much to learn before it can comprehend the full nature of that system which shall go on till “they shall no more teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know him, from the least of them to the greatest.”

The great doctrine of civil and religious freedom,—a doctrine of the most superlative importance,—a doctrine on which depends not merely the present happiness, but the spiritual destinies of men, inasmuch as tyranny and ignorance go hand in hand, and ignorance and crime:—this great doctrine his cotemporaries had glimpses of; but it can only be said of Fox, that he fully comprehended it. The Puritans and Covenanters fought for their liberties and their altars:—they resisted the aggressions of ecclesiastical establishments; but they did not deny their right to exist:—the Republicans fought for their own freedom with one hand, and held with the other their fellow men in bondage:—but Fox claimed freedom for all,—one right for all,—one law for all,—for man in every situation, character and aspect—for white and for black. It did not square with his notions of Christianity that we should be free ourselves, and hold others in slavery; that we should settle in the lands of the pagans, and drive them out of their ancestral possessions, as the nominal Christians of those and these times did and do in America, in the Indies, and at the Cape of Good Hope. The non-conformists resisted the compulsory

demands of uniformity of creed and ceremony of the Establishment; but Fox resisted and denounced establishments themselves. However all other reformers biassed by the force of education, might overlook the absolutely free nature of Christianity,—given to be the charter of liberty, the birthright of Hope in Earth and in Heaven, to all men—given to be the solace of all partaking the form, the affections, and the sufferings of men throughout the world—given “to break the bonds of the captive and to let the oppressed go free,”—to be enjoyed without permission from Pope or Patriarch, conclave or convocation, fully and fearlessly, wherever two or three are met in Christ’s name,—its freedom, and freedom-giving spirit did not escape the single-eye of Fox. In the declaration that “God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth”—in the avowal of Christ, that “the heathen lorded it over one another, but it should not be so with his disciples”—their bond and their distinction should be Love,—he saw the law of brotherhood and not of subjection. The same recognised independence of the Christian code which leads to the abjuration of political and ecclesiastical despotism led him to resist, despise, and expose those assumptions of absurd titles, those demands of servile obeisance and empty flatteries by mere wealth and factitious rank, which degrade both givers and receivers, and fill the world with so much misery from the reckless and vindictive rancour of over-fed pride. *Civility to all, servility to none*, was his rule and principle of action, and brought upon him and his friends unbounded insult and outrage; but they and the whole community have reaped and will reap the benefit of it. In that day there was a different style of address to the rich and the poor—a practice still common on the continent—*you* to a *gentleman*, *thou* to a *man*; and so odious and opposed to the whole spirit of the gos-

pel did it appear to Fox, that he adopted the singular number in speaking to every individual; and his followers have retained the practice to the present day, though the cause has ceased. The language has firmly settled into the other form, and the world is not, in this particular, likely to conform to a very small minority.

It has been said that a great change has taken place in the Society of Friends. That they have abandoned the bold and innovating spirit, and many of the eccentricities of their ancestors, and have silently let fall, or greatly modified, many of their opinions. They have changed exactly as every religious, and almost every other human community does. The effervescence of their first zeal has evaporated with time; and as the spirit has escaped, they have clung more closely to the letter. They have changed, too, with the silent change of the spirit and character of general society. Who does not see the wide difference between this age and the puritanic age in which they arose? Then all the elements of political and religious unrest were in a state of chaotic turbulence. The common people were only beginning to be imbued with, and to feel the full influence of, that scriptural knowledge, language, and imagery, which the diffusion of the Bible in the vernacular tongue had produced. They were in the orgasm of intellectual intoxication. The Puritans in England, and the Covenanters in Scotland, were full of that Bible light which had burst on them in such a novel torrent, that it had half illumined and half bewildered them. Their speech was a tissue of prophetic and apostolic phrases,---they were ready to fight and to die for their principles. The despotism of the Stuarts, pressing upon the patience of the nation till it snapped, concurred with this religious enthusiasm to rouse the whole realm into one scene of confusion and strife.

The different sects had not learned their own nature, and the real goal of their endeavors; the Presbyterians and Independents wrestled not only for liberty, but for power. All these circumstances have changed; the boundaries of religious liberty have been better defined by the continual labors of great and good men of all parties; no contrast can be greater than the one between the Baptists, Independents, and Presbyterians of that day and of this. The Friends have only partaken, in common with all other denominations, in the changes wrought by the same spirit passing over them. They have become a more orderly, quiet, less excited people; but they have not dropped one tenet, or abandoned one principle that I am aware of. It is true they have abated their public testimony to their principles in some particulars, and heightened it in others; and herein, I think, they have most mistaken or forsaken their real duty, and have failed to conform to the advance of knowledge both political and religious.

The cessation of persecution must have produced a strong effect upon them. From a state of perpetual harassing and outrage,---from having their meetings broken up by drunken squires and rancorous parsons, by mobs and soldiery,---their meeting-houses pulled down by order of government,---themselves shut up by thousands in most filthy and miserable dungeons,---their property plundered, their families insulted and abused;---from such a state of things to one of sudden political rest and security under the Toleration Act, the transition must have been of a most sedative nature. Like the sudden ceasing of physical torture, it must have left upon them a most exquisite sense of ease. They would be sufficiently inclined to repose themselves, and in that repose to look round and consider what they had lost, and what remained. They would see a government no longer in hostility

to them, and would be disposed to a grateful abstinence from irritation. From being regarded by their fellow-citizens with hatred, and pursued by them with outrage, as they were, for renouncing what were called the courtesies, but what they deemed the flatteries of the time,—the use of such appellatives, as your Honor, your Grace, your Excellency,—because they saw the men so addressed possessing neither honor, grace, nor excellence; for refusing to bow, take off the hat, and so on,—they had now won respect by their firmness and confidence by their integrity in all their transactions, and would therefore be disposed to enjoy a position of social kindness from which they had, for a time, been thrown. From their renouncement of public amusements and the dissipations of society, they were compelled to seek happiness in the bosom of their own families, and hence became a peculiarly domestic people: and, besides this, seeing the havoc which had been made in their estates, during the rage of persecution, they would now set about, as good citizens and fathers of families to repair them by sedulous habits of commercial industry. All these causes operating together, and with them their consequences, the satisfaction they came to feel in the full and free exercise of their own mode of religious worship—in their domestic relations---in the growth of their fortunes,---it was natural they should become a quiet people, a people submissive to good government, a people unworldly in their appearance, but worldly in their substance. This they have become: and the error has been that they have become too much so. They are aware of the purity of their Christian faith,---but they have not been zealously enough affected to its diffusion; they are sensible of the nobility and moral grandeur of their great principles,---but they have not labored enough to make the world sensible of this too, and to in-

vite its assistance to their propagation. In all instances they have held fast by their principles; but, perhaps, in only one have they stood forward as became their high moment, and made common cause with the public for their success. This brilliant exception has been in their resistance to Negro slavery: the consequence has been a triumph so splendid and so beneficent, that it ought not merely to stimulate, but to pledge them to similar experiments.

The high scriptural doctrine of human right, which they had adopted, compelled them, from the first, to denounce this detestable invasion of it. Fox on his visit to the West Indies, publicly exhorted those who listened to him to use their slaves kindly, and as soon as possible to give them their liberty. Clarkson, in his "Portraiture of Quakerism," says, that probably this was the first public denunciation of this infamous traffic. This is not correct, as his own history of its abolition sufficiently shows. Fox's honor is this; that he not only declared against it on the first possible opportunity, but organized a religious body on such principles that it must necessarily take up the cause of Negro freedom systematically. And this was the case. The Friends in America were the first to liberate their slaves, and advocate their freedom generally,---especially those pure and tender-hearted men, John Woolman and Anthony Benezet; and in England the Friends were the first to form an association for this object---an association which became the nucleus of that which finally achieved this magnificent object. From first to last the Friends were uniform and strenuous in their exertions to abolish slavery:---would to Heaven they had borne some of their other main doctrines as boldly into the public presence! What similar triumphs might we not have witnessed! Fox and his noble band of disciples were as actively hostile to the slavery of religion, under

the name of Establishments. They cried aloud in streets and market-places against it; they denounced it from the press and the prison; they called the people to the enjoyment of a free gospel; and thousands answered their call,---aye, even priests, descending from pulpits dishonored by a state dictation. And have their descendants abandoned their principles? No! but they have slept over its exercise. They have been content to be distrained upon for tithes and poor's-rates, to the annual amount of about £14,000,---and to be silent: to put these robberies in a book, and shut the book up in a closet. What a blaze of Christian zeal would they have kindled against a State Religion had they, like the first brave Friends, made the nation ring from side to side with the iniquity of the principle of these exactions. But that time has passed by; and now that the nation itself is awake to the enormity, they still stand fearful and inoperative. They persuade themselves it is right, it is religious, it is savouring of the meekness of Christ, to avoid all vehemence of zeal, everything that looks political. In this they may possess the private piety of their ancestors, but they possess not their public spirit,—they were quite another sort of men. In this we behold the prevalence of the latter habits of the Society over its original principle and power. Here they may continue to hold the splendid doctrine of Fox and Penn: but they hold it in nullity and barrenness. They have a testimony on the subject of forced payments for religion: but their forerunners had the testimony glorious in its indignant grandeur. The testimony of Fox on this subject was like the Law of Moses, received on Mount Sinai, amid its thunders and its lightnings,—theirs is like the same Law laid in the latter ages of Judea, in the dusty and untrodden silence of the Sanctuary. In this respect they certainly come far short,—yet there is a faint

evidence that the principle still lives in the petitions against tithes from the last two yearly meetings. May it yet kindle into its ancient glow!

The same cause has made them stand aloof from all political activity:—as if religion were a thing to be thought of and dreamed of merely; to be shut up in your own heart, your own house, or, at most, to regulate your own conduct between man and man in ordinary affairs,—not to extend to those great human movements in the mass, on which the happiness of the mass depends. They have interpreted the command to be subject to the powers that be, in too abject a spirit; as if the indignant enunciation of “Whether it is right we shall hearken unto God rather than you, judge ye!” is not as good gospel, clearly setting the bound to political submissiveness; and as if it were possible “to do to others as we would be done by,” if we use not all legitimate means to rescue our fellows from the immoderate pressure of unholy governments, which entail all miseries upon nations, by quenching nobility of sentiment, and darkening all intellects with crime. Obedience to good government is a shining virtue: but zealous endeavors to amend a bad one is not the less so. On this head there is room to return to that popular spirit of the first Friends which led them to address Kings and Parliaments in the highest style of remonstrance.

Their doctrine respecting oaths is one which they have held with commendable firmness against the whole Christian world. The world is now prepared to admit the justice of their views. It is seen that oaths do not bind the unprincipled, and the just do not need them—they are, therefore, at best a needless taking of God’s name in vain. Now, therefore, is the time for Friends to emulate the conduct of their fathers, by making their views on this head more

known, and showing that oaths, useless in themselves, are a palpable violation of the command of Christ.

If being at ease in their possessions has tended to dim their views of duty, or enfeeble their practice in these particulars, on the other hand they have carried to the highest point of scrupulosity their maintenance of what they call "their outward testimonies,"---that is, their peculiar mode of speech, behaviour, and apparel.

Their use of peculiar names for the days and months proceeds from a laudable desire carried to excess,---a desire to keep clear of names once belonging to idolatry,---into which there is now little danger of falling. Their rejection of fulsome titles, as his Grace, his Excellency, his Honor, must have the approbation of every honest man. Their adoption of *Thou* to a single person, *You* only to more than one, was at the time, for a reason given, noble and most admirable; but now, that the cause is removed, is a violation of modern grammar, without an adequate use,---and having an air of awkward formality rather than of reason. Their dress may be plain, but cannot be said to be comely, or even commodious. In most of these particulars they have clung to the form rather than the principle, which is the gospel one of plainness and simplicity---an excellent principle that may be carried into the fullest practice without a dogged adherence to a peculiar fashion, and with a rational conformity to the genius of the national costume. The first Friends made no change in their dress, if we except Fox's suit of leather, which no one imitates. William Penn was dressed as became a gentleman of the time. Christ knows nothing of the fashions of Oliver Cromwell's day: they form no part of his religion---which is not a religion of caps and coats of a certain cut, but of high and ennobling sentiments, and of the practice of everything which tends to bind man to man, and

prepare the heart for Heaven. An orthodox Quaker, dressing not, therefore, simply and rationally on the principle of plainness, but clinging anxiously, and perhaps proudly, to a traditionary form, stands an object of the most ludicrous inconsistency. In every thing beside he has followed the spirit and improvement of the times. His house is built, his furniture is made, his carpets are woven, his carriage is constructed, his very horse-harness cut, according to the increased lights, facilities, and extended means of progressive society. His bed is heaped with the softest materials, his table spread with the various luxuries which the full-grown spirit of art and science has taught our manufacturers, or the mighty winds of a boundless commerce have wafted from every region. The very fabric which he wears, and the hat which shades his brow, combine in them a hundred improvements made since the days of Penn and Barclay,—yet in the form alone he clings to the fashion of a far ruder age, and with it to inconvenience and deformity. He says he will not flatter the pride of the creature by ostentatious raiment;—he is right: but he should not disfigure that which God has created beautiful. The human figure, in its grace and dignity, is the perfection of the mechanism of the Divine Creator; and what God has taken so much pains to adorn, it become us not to deface.

Friends think that there is safety to their youth in this barbarous raiment. It is a mark, they say, upon them, by which the world knows them, and by which they feel themselves observed: as if clothes were not things that could be taken off. A Highlander asked an English traveller what was the use of the lock on his portmanteau; and being told it was to prevent its being robbed, he drew his dirk, and laughing, cut the portmanteau open. Outward marks are no safeguards;

the only real safeguards are sound moral principles within.

But if this shibboleth of language, and this barbarism of dress, do no good, they certainly do much evil. They have affected as the long raiment and the broad phylacteries did the Pharisees of old—they have induced much spiritual pride. It was easier to attribute undue importance to these, than to come up to the high standard of the living zeal of the ancient Friends. "The outward testimonies," have therefore become almost everything—the very ark and palladium of the Society—the mark and measure of its orthodoxy. They have cast into the shade its really great principles.

For these reasons I have no testimony to these Cromwellian fashions, but a decided testimony against them, as having done immeasurable injury to our cause. It is now high time that we become known by nobler tokens. It is time that, still despising all temporary and *outré* fashions, we conform to the general character of our national costume; that, loathing all fulsome flatteries, we speak the established English of the age; and, instead of being ambitious of being known by our singularity of dress or speech, we seek to avail ourselves of the great heritage of noble sentiments and principles bequeathed to us by George Fox. There is higher work for us to do than dressing or speaking oddly:—to assist our fellow-citizens to cast down the established enormity of priestcraft. Our ancestors set a brilliant example to their own times, and left a mighty lesson to this. They claimed for themselves a complete freedom from the national church; a freedom to marry and bury as they pleased; a freedom even from oaths; a freedom from those very things that the other Dissenters are at this late period seeking; and they obtained it,—showing that subjects have only to determine on the attainment of their rights,

and they cannot long be resisted. It becomes our bounden duty, being come of such a stock, to rouse our fellow-countrymen to this assertion of their due. To spread abroad better views of war and oaths; to inspire more elevated and just views of the character, offices, and duties of women,—the mothers and teachers of our children—the companions and friends of men; to awaken as many as we can to more spiritual conceptions of Christianity—of its freedom, its sufficiency, its beauty and beneficence:—these are our legitimate duties, and to these let us betake ourselves.

For my part, born and educated in this Society, I have seen enough to induce me to confess, that for its peculiarities I have little respect; for its great leading principles, the highest veneration. Amongst all the various society I have mingled in, I have nowhere seen a greater purity of life and sentiment; a more enviable preservation of a youth-like tenderness of conscience; a deeper sense of the obligations of justice; of the beauty of punctuality; or so sweet a maintenance of the domesticities of life. A thousand memories of youth, and youthful actions now past—a thousand happy and tender associations—bind me in affection to it. I look with a grateful complacency on the luminous views of truth which George Fox drew from the great archives of Christianity, as a glorious legacy to the world; which has already received mighty benefits therefrom, and is now prepared to reap still greater. A day is certainly coming upon us when many old prejudices shall be thrown down; when we shall work with purer hands and simpler views; when we shall feel it necessary to regard all men as brothers, really made of one flesh, and ordained to one salvation,—not as mere machines for us to grow rich upon; when we shall look on the poorest of them, not as creatures living here only, but to live on through thousands of ages, and therefore demand-

ing from us a higher estimate, a better tuition, a more human fellowship; and, if this be so, it will be an everlasting reproach to that community which has called itself a *Society of Friends*, if it be not found amongst the foremost of those who are laboring, and will labor, to lay the foundation of an *illimitable Christian Friendship*, in the mighty and pregnant principles of Knowledge, Virtue, and Love.

MERRIHEW & GUNN, Printers,
No. 7 Carters' Alley, Phila.
