

ART. VI.—MS. (XVII century) *Epistles of Early Friends.*

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Read at Furness Abbey Hotel, Sept. 23rd, 1895.

GEORGE FOX and his disciples, over two centuries ago, used, like the apostles of the primitive church, to write Epistles; which their co-religionists valued as inspired, and circulated from meeting to meeting in manuscript. Before Quakerism was twenty years old, collections of these Epistles began to be made. One, perhaps the first, certainly among the first, was that of JOHN SPOORE, a Somersetshire schoolmaster; he fair-copied a number of them, and formed as it were a supplementary Bible for the nascent church. In 1675 he handed over his collection to his pupil JOHN WHITING, who continued it, and following in his master's steps became the chief collector of Quaker literature,—his *Catalogue of Friends' Books*, 1708, being the standard bibliography until the appearance of Joseph Smith's *Descriptive Catalogue* in 1867.

JOHN SPOORE's book, continued by JOHN WHITING,—The Epistles of the first Evangelists and Martyrs of the new Gospel,—was lost, and many of its pieces, so far as I can learn, were never printed. It was found some time ago in Jersey by Mr. Hugh Anderson, who kindly sent it to me: but since its interest nowadays is chiefly antiquarian, I have placed it in the Bibliotheca Jacksoniana as a contemporary record of some remarkable north countrymen in the XVII century.

It is a volume of 241 pages in antique court-calligraphy, containing, among others, letters signed by GEORGE FOX and MARGARET FELL of Swarthmoor; also by men about whom I need say nothing, as their lives are given in

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Chancellor Ferguson's *Early Cumberland and Westmorland Friends*: namely, JOHN AUDLAND of Kendal, EDWARD BURROUGH of Underbarrow, GEORGE WHITEHEAD of Orton, and JOHN CAMM of Camsgill, who here writes "For freinds about Oulston (Ulverston), Kendelshire, Bristoll, and elsewhere." It contains also materials,—otherwise, I believe, unknown,—for records of two Furness men, who do not come into the scope of the Chancellor's work, and yet deserve a niche among the worthies of our district.

THOMAS SALTHOUSE, born, Smith says, about 1630, at Druggilbeck, Lancashire (Dragley Beck near Ulverston), here is represented by "An epistle to friends in y^e north country in their meetings at Swarthmore and elsewhere in Lancashire, Westmoreland and Cumberland," dated from "Ivelchester Goale, 12-6mo.-1657." Set free from prison he writes from Reading and "Kendalshire" in 1658, and from Scalehouse near Skipton in 1659: but we find him back in the same gaol in 1660, spending his Christmas-day, or as he dates it "25-12 mo.-1660," in writing consolation to his fellow sufferers "in every desert, den, & cabbin to w^{ch} many of you are by constraint confined for yo^r obedience to y^e command of Christ." He tells how "my dear Brother J. S[taffe] & I have been under Restraint near two months at this place, in w^{ch} time y^e number of prisoners have Increased insomuch y^t we are near two hundred freinds in prison in this place." One is glad to find by Smith's brief record that the writer of these cheery and kindly letters survived this imprisonment by some thirty years, dying in 1690.

His friend JOHN STAFFE (not mentioned in Smith, nor in Tuke's *Biographical Notices*, 1815), seems to have been a comrade also of John Spore, the beginner of this collection of letters. We find him writing "To the generall assembly & church of y^e first Borne wth in Westmoreland & Comberland," 14-3 mo.-1658; and "To

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all y^e called of y^e Lord in and about Hutton, Preston, Underbarrow, Kendall, Grarigg, & Sedber," and he dates another letter "Cumberland, 12-8 mo.-1659." So that, if not a native, he was for some time a resident in our district.

The other Furness worthy is WILLIAM CATON, who was educated along with young Fell at Swarthmoor, and at the age of 17 or 18 was converted by George Fox. Before he was twenty he had travelled on foot throughout England and Scotland as an evangelist, had preached at Calais with a Scotch nobleman to interpret, and at Flushing and Amsterdam, the first Quaker to set foot in Holland. The rest of his short life, some nine years more, was spent in journeyings, and imprisonments, and perils by land and sea, for he went frequently to the Continent,—indeed he ultimately married a Dutch girl, Annekin Dirricks of Amsterdam (see Tuke's *Biographical Notices*). From him we have a report of adventures at Zutphen, a town whose name reminds us of another good Englishman, traditionally connected with Furness, as a visitor to Coniston Hall,—I mean Sir Philip Sidney. This letter gives an insight into the Quakers' methods of missionary work,—that is to say, in spite of misrepresentations, *modern* missionary work in its first beginnings: and William Caton's phrasing (*e.g.* "boulted the doore of us") and pronunciation (*e.g.* "Lowes" for "laws"), curiously recall, to any who have heard them, those country preachers who, though not of the 'Society,' are the true spiritual descendants of the fiery-hearted Quaker apostles. He writes (and Whiting's copy bears the stamp of editorial exactitude):—

"Amsterdam in Holand the 3 day 5th moneth (1657).

" . . . My Deare Brother William Ames and I have bine through some of y^e prinsaple Citties in Gilderland: and a great sound is gone through y^e Country: but our moueings was especially to Zutphen; A Citty out of w^{ch} William Ames had bine Banished; not
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wth standing for ye defence of y^e truth wee were willing to hazard our lives in ye behalfe of it w^{ch} was much scandellised and reproched by ye people called Baptists especially who are in these countreyes generally great opposites: so into ye Citty we passed to their meettings: and when wee should have gone in: they boulted the doores of us: and would not admitt us: and William being well knowne (haueing bine three dayes to geather before ye magistrats when hee was Bannished) the rude multitude presently gathered about us: and to auoyd ye accencion of a tumulte: wee wth drew out of ye streats to ye walles of ye Citty unto w^{ch} many people followed us: And Docters wth other great men came to us some to trap and insnare us in our words and others to see some strang thing: but in ye wisdom of God we were preserued: and their expectation was frustrated: for as we were allowed of God soe we spake: not wth enticeing words of mans wisedome (and therefore could not they insnare and trap us: in their wisedom) for by ye liueing power of God in w^{ch} we spoke: the wicked spirits in ye Auditours were Chayned downe to admiration that so they could not accomplish their mischievous designs: and after we were Cleare: we passed to our lodgeing (w^{ch} was out of ye Citty) haueing many stones throwne at us: but little or no harme we received; praised bee the Lord. And in ye after noone there came not a few to us: that soe our seruice was very great that day: for seuerall hundreds heard us with diligence and many bookees we dispersed amongst them in their owne language and seuerall there was that receiuied good satisfaction: and y^e liueing truth of our God was freely held forth to them: and by that dayes seruice much cleared and aduansed: Now a great sound rings through ye country: And many books haue we gotten lately translated and printed: the perusing of w^{ch} doth a little Qualifie ye spirits of some: who begins to intrude by way of query: A little ffarther into things than heretofore they haue done: And about ye place aforesaid Williams Ames haue thoughts of staying: But ye magistrates sent an officer to Charge ye people to keep us noe longer: for they seemed to be no little offended: that William should presume to come againe into their liberty: after hee had bine by them bannished: moreouer they threatned: that any baptists came at us: they should be serued in like manner: w^{ch} thretnings with that w^{ch} they haue done already: doth kepe ye people in much slauery and fearfullness: that they dare not appear scarce so much as to Vindicate that w^{ch} they are Convinced off: the Magistrates opposission and Cruell thretnings seems to be a great hindrance to ye truth at present: for in this country here is scarce a Towne: but it hath Lowes and statuts in its selfe: and so by its pow^r may proceed against

against those who are judged to be offendors: if it bee to put them to death: and so each towne seekes to defend it selfe by banishing out of its libertyes those that are against its costomes: and thus for y^e present many wth y^e powers of y^e earth: stands up against y^e truth: being thus farr conuinced that wee come to take peace from y^e earth: And to distroy their costomes: yea in a word their Diana: And therefore with one consent doth y^e craftes men combine together to hale us before their Judgment seates: yea and all formes as one: seekes our excilement out of their costes ffarewell:—

“ Your deare Brother and member
of y^e same Body with you:—

William Caton.”