

ART. X.—*Chancellor Burn and the Quakers.* By the
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THE Rev. Edward Holme, vicar of Orton, has kindly allowed me to examine a correspondence, which is preserved in the church chest, between his distinguished predecessor, Chancellor Burn, and several earnest members of the Society of Friends.

In volume i., pp. 536-540, of Nicolson and Burn's *History*, under Kirkby Stephen, there is a lengthy footnote with extracts from "two very notable pamphlets," written by Francis Higginson. As these were extremely scarce, it was thought not amiss to preserve in the *History* some of their contents. These extracts gave rise to the correspondence, and it would seem right that, if any statements in a work of such repute are questionable, they should be corrected.

(1) The first letter, dated April 19th, 1778, is from Thomas Harrison, a Kendal attorney, who, addressing Dr. Burn as "Dear Friend," encloses a long epistle from his brother in London respecting the extracts.

(2) This letter of George Harrison, April 15th, 1778, refers to an extract in the *Monthly Review* of the preceding March, which gave an account of the first Quakers on the authority of the *History*. G. Harrison says he was much surprised that a writer of Dr. Burn's reputation and abilities should sanction a narrative of such suspicious origin. Further, that the marks of prejudice were so evident as to make many readers suppose the historian to be credulous or wanting in Christian charity. He therefore requests his brother to communicate to Dr. Burn some remarks sent by "a particular friend" to the *Monthly Review*, and to ask him, in case of a second edition, to

qualify the "rancorous tale of Parson Higginson," who had been, as the Chancellor says, "very active against Quakers."

I imagine the brother Thomas Harrison to have left the Friends or to have incurred their displeasure, for George refers to the "predicament thou stands in with the Society."

(3) Next we have a copy of the letter of the "particular friend," bearing no date or signature, to the editor of the *Review*, who by adding to the incriminated extract the epithet "curious" had given it their sanction—*i.e.*, in the writer's opinion. By way of commentary on the *History*, I had better quote *verbatim* almost the whole of this letter:—

It seems somewhat extraordinary that a gentleman of Dr Burn's great & deserved Reputation in the literary world should have thought it fair to draw from its obscurity a paper written at a time when the minds of most men were heated with religious prejudice, & when the Clergy more particularly were irritated against the Quakers because their tenets, opposing the venal support of the priesthood, sapped the very foundation of its splendour & authority. Nor perhaps did they scruple to add the epithet of hireling to those who, making a trade of religion, brought it into disrepute among the people.

At the Quarter Sessions at Appleby in Westmorland in January, 1652, James Naylor, a Quaker, was tried for blasphemy. The Trial is still extant, & it appears from thence that Higginson, Vicar of Kirkby Stephen, was a Promoter of that Prosecution. Naylor was then honorably discharged, nothing of that kind being proved against him, unless it be reckon'd Blasphemy to oppose Higginson's Assertion, repeated in open Court, that "Christ is in Heaven with a carnal Body." Both the Temper of the good Vicar & the complexion of his Divinity may perhaps be infer'd from this Anecdote.*

It must not however be denied that the same James Naylor afterwards fell into Delusions of the Imagination, scarcely short of

* The particular friend, in these two sentences, is a careless critic. Higginson had certainly said that "Christ is in Heaven with a carnal body," but at the trial he carefully explained what he meant by carnal—*i.e.*, real, fleshly, or of flesh, and not as it is used in the Scriptures in the tense of what is opposed to holy and spiritual.

Insanity. He was then disown'd by the Quakers, yet some eminent writers have taken Occasion from this Instance, and a few others of the like kind, to charge those Irregularities upon the Principles of the Society, for which Individuals alone ought to be responsible.

The evidence of Higginson carries with it all the marks of that wanton exaggeration, which characterizes personal Animosity. The charge is supported by no Proof. Gerard Croese, indeed, in his History of the Quakers, mentions a Petition from the Ministers, & Sundry other Persons of Lancashire, against George Fox, James Naylor, and their Associates, in which they are accused of foaming at the mouth in their Conventicles, & of other strange Agitations; & G. Fox in particular of having said that he was equal to God, the only Judge of the World, Christ, the Way, the Truth & the Life. One James Milner was also charged with saying that he was God & Christ, and with prophesying that the Day of Judgment was at Hand, that there shou'd be no more Justices in Lancashire, & that the Parliament should be pluckt up by the Roots. Higginson's Narrative & this Petition bear striking Marks of Affinity with each other & probably sprung from the same Source. Croese, however, who was no Quaker, nor is his History partial to the Quakers, acknowledges "that these charges were so compleatly refuted that it was apparent they who invented them were wicked Men & they who believed in them were Fools." He excepts the mad Presumption of Milner, whom he says the Quakers rebuked. The Truth is, that as the Quakers for the Reason abovemention'd were especially singled out as the objects of Priestly Indignation, every Rumour to their Disadvantage was eagerly adopted & frequently spread with Circumstances of Aggravation. Thus a Vicar of Wakefield, whose Name was Marshall, reported of George Fox *that he rode upon a great black Horse & was seen within an Hour at two Places sixty miles distant from each other.* If the Papers of this Vicar were narrowly searched into, perhaps it might be found recorded as his opinion that the first Quakers were witches. It must notwithstanding be acknowledged that it was not unusual for some of the most zealous to go sometimes into the public Places of Worship & after the Preacher had finished his Discourse, to reprove both Priest & People for Practices which they considered as superstitious or antichristian.

Amongst the Swarm of Sects which distinguished the last Century, there was One, of which little is now known, but that the Practices of its adherents outraged all Decency & order. They were called Ranters. The Enemies of the Quakers found it frequently suitable to their Purpose to confound them with this Ephemeron Sect, whose Principles were, nevertheless, totally incompatible with those of

the Quakers. There is a Paper still extant written by Edward Burroughs, an active Preacher among the Quakers, against the licentious Practices of those People.

Hume & Voltaire are two remarkable Instances of the Facility with which Reports respecting the Quakers have been received & propagated. The first of these Historians cites (from Echard) an odd Compound of Affectation & Rudeness as the Address of the Quakers to James the 2nd on his Accession to the Throne, in which there is not one Sentence of the real Address: The latter relates (*Lettres sur les Anglais*) a Story of George Fox's Preaching from the Pillory to a large Auditory, who were so affected with his Discourse that they released him & put the Minister who prosecuted him in his Place; which is equally destitute of Foundation.

It is hoped that the learned & respectable Authors of the Work alluded to will, in a future Edition, do the first Quakers the Justice to abate the Degree of Faith given to Higginson's Testimony, & that in the meantime the Known Candour of the Authors of the *Monthly Review* will admit these Exceptions to the Truth of it.

Of this letter I would observe that the critic himself, for a gentle and peace-loving friend, uses sufficiently strong language against the clergy. Having myself repeated a tale of Parson Higginson's in a recent paper on "Shap Church," I was relieved to find the candid admission above that zealous Quakers were in the habit of publicly rebuking the priest in church for superstitious practices.

(4) The next letter is from George Bewley, of Kendal, March 30th, 1778:—

Rich^d Burn

In my perusal of the History of Westmorland lately published by thee & J. Nicolson, I very unexpectedly met with the Revival of many heavy Accusations cast upon the People called Quakers at their first appearance in this County, which I find were answered soon after their Publication by those immediately concerned.

By thy own Account, F. Higginson, the Author or Publisher of these Accusations was the professed Adversary of that People, and concerned in the Prosecutions (or rather Persecutions) which were carried on against them.

This should naturally have suspended thy Judgment, until thou hadst also examined their answer, which probably might have prevented this Republication, or at least have led thee to confront

their Reply with the Extravagancies & Disorders charged upon them, if thy Intention was solely to revive & perpetuate Matters of Fact—But the unnecessary Introduction of this Matter (which has no Connexion that I can see with the Subject of the History) from the Representation of one of the Parties only, too plainly indicates thy Intention to have been thereby to cast an Odium upon the present religious Society of the Quakers, who have long approved themselves in the Eyes of the Nation to be a peaceable and quiet People, and are even generally acknowledged to be a respectable Body.

If thou hadst desired or designed to give to the World a just & fair Narrative of their Principles and Practice (which an Historian ought to do) thou couldst not have been at a Loss for Information, if thou hadst perused the Books which they published in the early Part of their appearance, from whence alone the proper Information is to be obtained—for as they were only justly responsible for what they themselves publicly held forth and maintained, and not for what others falsely imputed to them, so their Doctrines should be wholly taken from their own Works.

Thou hast well said the Opposition made to their Progress was preposterous, but I cannot allow it was well meant as thou hast also confidently asserted. A Multiplicity of Instances might be adduced (if necessary) wherein the said People, for peaceably assembling together to worship God in solemn Reverence and awe, and for declaring what they believed their indispensable Duty to declare & for no other Reason, were haled out of their meetings, violently beaten & abused conducted to Prison & treated there as the worst of Thieves and Murderers, until some of them finished their Days in this oppressive & undeserved Confinement.

What shadow of a well meant Intention does there appear or could there be in inflicting such Hardships (or rather Cruelties) on at least a morally innocent People ?

And had the Priests (who were generally the Instigators to this Treatment) really believed them to be in Error & under a Deception, could they not have used rational Endeavour to convince or reclaim them ? But now though a great Clamor was raised & a mighty Stir made in granting Warrants against them, apprehending them, putting them in Prison and bringing them to Trial, let me seriously query of thee, whom did they ever injure either in Property or Person ? Their very Adversaries in all their Trials scarcely ever (and then falsely) laid any Accusations of that kind against them.

What then did they so highly offend in ? The Sum of the whole Matter was that they publicly yet peaceably declared the Principles they professed & supported them by Scripture Evidence, & called

the People to consider everyone for themselves, & no longer rest on the Teachings of Men, who only preached for Hire & divined for Money & said the Lord said, when the Lord had not spoken unto them; but submissively attend to the Dictates of divine Grace inwardly manifested to every Man during the Day of his Visitation, that they thereby might come to a living and saving knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

What occasion then was there for the Tumults & Oppositions which the Priests stirred up and excited amongst the People, if they meant to act well? For they & such as assisted them were the sole cause of the many Disturbances which illdesigning Malice charged upon this Innocent People.

If they had disapproved of their Doctrines they might either quietly have held such opinions & Tenets as they themselves did approve, or else (as hinted above) have laboured in a true Christian Spirit of Meekness to rectify what they thought erroneous by rational & candid arguments. But the Truth was, they found the spreading of the plain Christian Doctrines, which the people called Quakers were conscientiously concerned to declare, tended to spoil their Trade, and therefore they were unwilling the People should be persuaded to think for themselves, lest by having their Eyes opened into the Freedom of the Gospel Dispensation, they should no longer tamely and tacitly submit to the yokes of Superstition and Priestcraft, which were derived and still retained from the Innovations of the apostatized Church of Rome. Notwithstanding the Violence of all this opposition, God who called them was with them and brought them through, and in the Course of his providence has granted them a time of outward ease and liberty, which some amongst them have received with ingratitude, having deviated from the steps of their Predecessors & fallen into a servile imitation of and conformity to several of the prevalent customs & fashions of the times, which they bore a strict testimony against; which Testimony a number amongst them, who have come up in the same simplicity of obedience are still concerned to perpetuate, although there is this great & visible declension in others.

The indirect attack made upon the Quakers by the manner of this publication must I apprehend upon candid consideration appear to thyself (as I doubt not it will to the sensible readers of the passage) illiberal & very unfair; and therefore I think it is incumbent upon thee, either publicly to reprobate & condemn this unjust dealing, or publish thy objections (if thou hast any to make) against the Doctrines³³ professed & acknowledged by the present Society of the Quakers in a direct plain and undisguised manner, that they may

have a fair opportunity of writing in their own justification & defence.

From a lover of Truth and a wellwisher to all mankind.

Geo: Bewley.

* I have said Doctrines only, because if the practices of any members of the Society are not consistent with their Established Doctrines, they stand ipso Facto condemned by them—and it would be equally just to condemn the Church of England for the enormous wickedness of some of its members as to calumniate the Quakers as a Society for the Misconduct of some of their Disorderly Members.

(5) The last letter is the rough copy of the reply of Dr. Burn through the “authors of the *Monthly Review*” to the particular friend:—

Orton Ap 22 1778.

D^r S^r, I have c fav^r of y^{rs} inclosg a copy of a letter to c Monthly Reviewers, w wch I am as much concern^d as c Reviewers. As to c substantial proof wof, my ansr s, ct I hav always manifested, & (I trust) will alws b willg & desirous to manifest my sincere regard for c pent genern of quakers, as (in my opinion) living up to c principles cy profess better cn ocr denominns of Xns. And if any umbrage may b supposed to b taken at w^t I hav advanc^d in c passage refer^d to, I cnk c w^{at} y^r brocr proposes s very right, & in case of a 2^d Edn I will certainly take care to qualify ct matter ct no occn ma b taken for c future.

Havg s^d cus much; I beg leave to make an observn or two. I am charged, in c letter to c Reviewers (I do not know how it has hap^d) wc *credulity*, in trustg too implicitey in some *unpublished* (as supposed) memoirs of one M^r Higginson, vicar of K. St. I c book I say ct M^r H. writ 2 notable pamphlets ag^t Quakers, & ct I h^d seen a printed copy crof cr r ansrs, & replies, & rejoinders, & surrejoinders.

The facts really wr nt denied . c quakers recriminated upon c ministers & justices . and boc parties, I doubt not, charg^d cr antagonists justly enough. The enthusiasts seem for c time to hav bn actually out of cr senses: the persecutors [c mrs & justices] acted like madmen under ocr direction cn influence of cr reason. But how c quakers & c mrs of c psnt da sh^d cnk cmselves concern^d wc w^t quakers & mrs said or did 127 y^s ago I must own is beyond my comprehension.

I rec^d a lr some tim ago fm a friend of y^{rs} M^r Geo Bewley (a quaker) wm I hav nt c hon^r to know. He wl nt allow ct c mrs & justices meant well in persecutg Nailor, & rest of cm: But cs point I wdnt hav scrupl^d t give up t cm, ca' all psecutrs fm c days of St Paul to c time psnt, hav had a knack of psuadg cmselves, ct crin cy do G service, i.e. in playg c devil for h^{'s} sake.

M^r B also challenges me t publish my obj^{ns} ag^t c doctrines of c psnt society of Q^s. I c^d hav ans^r^d ct challenge by sayg I h^d no objectns to make, hav^g no inclinon to ntr into any controversy of ct kind.

Bt cr s one cng wch must needs intercept all ,munion betw us, & puts it intirely out of my power to ans^r s lr, or to take any notice of t; and ct is cs: I hav s^d in c b, ct c quakers wr rend^d ,sidbl by opposn; & ct by lettg cm alone, cy ar coming ab^t of cmselves, & in c next genn cr formal absurdities wd b no more heard of.

Now what does cs gentleman ans^r to c^s? He says, "Notw^{stg} c violence of oppositn, God who call^d cm (c quakers) ws wc cm & brot cm cro', & in c crse of s providence has grant^d cm a time of outw^d ease, libty , *wch some amongst cm have recd wc ingratitude, having deviated fm c steps of cr pdecessors, , fallen into a servile imitn , formity to sevl of c pvalent customs & fashions of c times*, wch cy bore a strict testimony ag^t; wch testimony a number amongst cm, wo hav come up in c same simplicity of obedience are still ,cern^d to ppetuate, also' cr b cs *great & visible declensn in ocrs.*"

Now I take cs to b one great blow struck at a vast numb of y own particlr acquaintance,—yourself, my dear friend, in c front rank; about half a dozen ocrs in c toun of K. & (I ma add) ab^t 99 in a hund^d of all quakers in c Km. Now ma nt cs b deem^d a very xtrody case if I must b found fault wc only for sayg ct a grt while ago half a dozen silly women ran naked about c streets of K wc a parcel of schlboys at cr heels, uttering nonsense ["blasphemies & absurdies" erased]; and anocr gentleman shd receive no rebuke fr charging some of c most respectable wc ingratitude, backslidg, servility & deviating fm c steps of cr more worthy prdecessors.

Bt some p^s h^d better steal c horse cn ocrs look over c hedge. And so c aucor of c letter to c monthly reviewers wo is nt willg ct I shld call Nailor an Enthusiast, yet mslf says ct Nailor fell into delusn of imaginn, scarcely short of profanity.

P.S. My valuabl old friend M^r Tho^s Rebanks wd sometimes convert me (observg in me, I suppose, at sm time, some tokens of Grace). And I promis^d m, ct if ever I chang^d my relgn I wd turn quaker. Ay, says he, bt cr ar c loaves , fishes in c way: if cou wlt forego cy tempy emolumts, I shl soon ,vince cee by argumt: but w^t can argumt do ag^t solid metal? (as much as to say accordg to c old phraseology, "Thou hireling, thou.")

B^t I beg pardon for expatiatg on cis subj^t ncing indeed could hav xtorted t fm me bt a zeal for c honour of so many of my worthy friends, w^m I conceive to b greatly injur^d by cese unkind aspersions.

I have no evidence that the letter was actually sent as given above; indeed, the rough copy must have been materially altered in many sentences. But the result of a comparison of the correspondence with the original extract is that one's respect for the great Chancellor as a fair-minded and reliable historian is not at all diminished, and that one sees very little in the *History* that needs erasure or correction. The correspondents admit a good deal, and on other points they give consent by silence.

A little practice will decipher Dr. Burn's shorthand.