

## GEORGE FOX

Perhaps no other small denomination of Christians has so influenced the world for good as have the Quakers, or Friends. When George Fox, the founder of the Friends' Societies, began his preaching, the churches everywhere were dead and formal, and when the churches drift into formalism the world drifts into infidelity. A formal church has always resulted in an unbelieving world. The Quaker movement seems to have been raised up of God just in the nick of time to save the church from formalism and the world from infidelity. George Fox, like the ancient prophets, was sent of God to call the church from formalism to a real spiritual worship. Like many other great reformers, he was doubtless an extremist on some lines, but it sometimes seems to be necessary for reformers to be extremists in order to thoroughly arouse the people. We cannot agree with the Friends in discarding the outward ordinances, which seem so clearly taught in the Scriptures and which seem to have been practiced by the early Christian church and by the churches all down through the centuries of the Christian era. But perhaps the Lord allowed the Friends to thus discard all outward ordinances in order the more clearly to direct the minds of the people to the fact that He requires spiritual worship, and not mere forms and ceremonies.

On many great questions the Friends were far in advance of the times in which the movement was founded. They raised their voices clearly against slavery nearly two hundred years before others were brought to see the injustice, cruelty and sin of the traffic in human beings. Another matter in which the Friends were far in advance of others was in their opposition to war. They have probably been more instrumental than any other body of people in bringing about the present opposition to warfare.

The peace and arbitration movements of today doubtless owe their origin to the Quakers more than to any other class of persons. The Friends have also been foremost in freeing woman from the bondage and subjection in which she has been kept all down through the ages, especially in Oriental lands. Believing that Paul's instructions concerning the subordination of women were only a temporary concession to the prejudice of the age in which he lived, the Friends have encouraged the reaching, preaching, and ministry of women as have no other denomination of Christians, with perhaps the exception of the Salvation Army, which is of more recent origin and which may have been influenced by the Friends. From the beginning of the movement the Friends have opposed not only war and slavery of every kind, but they have also done much to secure the abolition of capital punishment for minor offences, imprisonment for debt, and religious persecution of every kind.

It may be said that the reason why the Quakers have been leaders in so many great reforms, and the reason why they have been so prosperous in business affairs, is because their form of worship appeals to and attracts only persons of great reflective power and mental ability, and does not appeal to the masses. While there is some truth in this assertion, we believe that it is also true that the great reason why the Friends were leaders in spiritual thought and business enterprises was because God enlightened and blessed them because of their consecration to His service.

The remarkable thing about the Quaker movement, so far in advance of its times on so many great questions, was that it was founded by a poor and uneducated shoemaker. But many of the greatest leaders, like Bunyan, Moody, and Spurgeon, have been raised up from among the common people. "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Cor. 1:27). George Fox began his preaching without a follower, without belonging to anything, without any special training, without a place to preach in, and without social prestige of any kind. He raised his voice

uncompromisingly against all the popular evils of the age, against the formalism of both the established and free churches, and against the religious persecutions for which the King and magistrates were responsible. He was persecuted, beaten, stoned, arrested and imprisoned more frequently perhaps than any other person who ever lived, there are few pages in his large journals which do not contain some reference to his being mobbed, stoned, arrested, or haled before the magistrates. In like manner his followers were persecuted and imprisoned because they opposed so many popular evils and refused to conform to ceremonies and practices which they could not conscientiously perform. It is probable that George Fox and the early Quakers suffered more for conscience sake and the cause of religious freedom, and did more to bring about religious liberty, than did any other class of people since the days of the Reformation. Over and over again they were thrown into prison for not doing things they could not conscientiously do, especially for not conforming to the state church, for refusing to enter the army and navy, and because they would not take judicial oaths. It is estimated that at one time, in the year 1662, no less than 4,500 Quakers were in prison in England and Wales for causes of this kind. But notwithstanding all they suffered for the cause of religious freedom, George Fox and the early Quakers increased in favor with God and man.

Prejudice against them gradually died away. People found that they could trust them, and Friends in business were better patronized than any other class of people. Nations are coming more and more to recognize the right to religious liberty and freedom of conscience for which the Friends suffered so much. All over the world today there is talk of abolishing war and settling differences in a judicial and reasonable way rather than by murder and brute force. Thus mighty movements for the advancement of "peace on earth and goodwill toward men " were brought about to a great extent by the humble ministry of a poor English cobbler, just as the world's most helpful book (the Word of God being excepted), " Pilgrim's Progress," was written by a poor illiterate English tinker, John Bunyan.

George Fox, the famous founder of the Quaker, or Friends', societies, was born in 1624, at Drayton-in-the-Clay, Leicestershire, England. His father, he says, "was a weaver, an honest man; and there was a seed of God in him. The neighbors called him Righteous Christer. My mother was an upright woman; her name was Lago, and she was of the stock of the martyrs."

Like Savonarola, Fox was solemn and grave even as a child, and was unlike other children around him. At eleven years of age he definitely yielded his heart to God, and ever afterward sought to live an honest, upright life. His parents, who were members of the Church of England, desired to train him in their way of worship, but did not urge him to conform to the Established Church. As he grew up, some of his relatives wished him to become a priest, but others persuaded him to the contrary. He apprenticed himself to a shoemaker, who also dealt in wool and had many sheep. In this position much money went through the hands of Fox, but he says that the Lord's power was with him so that he "never wronged a man or woman" in all that time.

At the age of nineteen Fox was deeply grieved and shocked at the levity of some professing Christians, one of them being his own cousin, who asked him into a booth at a fair and then began to drink healths. He was so deeply grieved over this that he could not sleep all night, but walked up and down his room praying to the Lord. Even as a young man he was very careful of his conduct and conversation. " For the Lord showed me" says he, "that though the people of the world have mouths full of deceit, and changeable words, yet I was to keep to Yea and Nay in all things; and that my words should be few and savoury, seasoned with grace; and that I might not eat and drink to make myself wanton, but for health," etc. In 1643 he became so deeply grieved with the lightness and frivolity of the world that he broke off all companionships with both old and young; and traveled to many strange places to be away from all friends, relatives, and acquaintances, and to be alone with God. He avoided conversing even

with professing Christians, "for I was sensible," says he, "that they did not possess what they professed." He was in great distress, and strong temptation and despair seized upon him. "I was about twenty years of age when these exercises came upon me," says he, "and I continued in that condition some years, in great trouble, and fain would have put it from me. I went to many a priest to look for comfort, but found no comfort from them." The remedies suggested for his state of mind were - that he should marry; that he should enlist in the army; that he should take physic and be bled; and one priest to whom he described his feelings of despair advised him to use tobacco and sing psalms; "but" says Fox, "tobacco was a thing I did not love, and psalms I was not in a state to sing." He was grieved that he had opened his mind to a man who would give such advice.

He found his advisers all miserable comforters. One who lived at Tamworth was said to be "an experienced man" but Fox went to see him and found him to be "like an empty hollow cask". Dr. Craddock, of Coventry, to whom Fox went for advice, flew into a rage because the despondent youth accidentally stepped on the edge of his flower bed.

Finding that he could get no help from men, Fox began to look to the Lord alone for help, and slowly the light began to dawn upon him. He was led to see "that being bred at Oxford and Cambridge did not qualify or fit a man to be a minister of Christ." His eyes were also opened to see that "only those were really believers in Christ who had passed from death unto life." He now left off going to the Established Church with his relatives. Neither did he go to any of the dissenting churches. He now went out into the fields with his Bible to study it for himself. He also spent much time in fasting and prayer. The Lord showed him many "openings," as he called them. Among other things, says he, "It was opened in me 'that God, who made the world, did not dwell in temples made by hands.' This at first seemed a strange word, because both priests and people used to call their temples or churches, dreadful places, holy ground, and the temples of God. But the Lord showed me clearly, that He did not dwell in those temples which men had commanded and set up, but in people's hearts; for both Stephen and the Apostle Paul bore testimony, that He did not dwell in temples made with hands, not even in that which He had once commanded to be built, since He put an end to it ; but that His people were His temple, and He dwelt in them." Fox also claims that the Lord gave him many "openings" concerning the meaning of the book of Revelation. After this, when clergymen or others told him that Revelation was "a sealed book" he would tell them that Christ could open the seals.

The Lord continued to lead him on from step to step in his Christian experience, but his troubles were not completely removed, although he often felt some degree of peace and joy. He hungered and thirsted for a deeper experience, and the Lord showed him that it was possible for him to have complete spiritual victory. He was led to see that there are two laws controlling men, the law of the flesh and the law of the Spirit, and that through the indwelling Spirit of God the Christian should have "liberty and victory over the flesh and its works." He now began to win many souls for Christ wherever he went; and in 1647 he began to declare to professing Christians the deep truths which God had been revealing to him. "But the professors were in a rage," says he, "all pleading for sin and imperfection, and could not endure to hear talk of perfection, and of a holy and sinless life."

Soon afterwards he began to preach. Fox passed through a remarkable spiritual experience which made him a fourteen days' wonder to many. A certain man named Brown, while on his death-bed, prophesied many great things concerning Fox. "When this man was buried," says Fox, "a great work of the Lord fell on me, to the admiration of many who thought I had been dead; and many came to see me for about fourteen days. I was very much altered in countenance and person, as if my body had been new molded or changed". While I was in that condition I had a sense and discerning given me by the Lord, through which I saw plainly that when many people talked of God and of Christ, etc., the serpent spoke in them;

but this was hard to be borne. Yet the work of the Lord went on in some, and my sorrows and troubles began to wear off, and tears of joy dropped from me, so that I could have wept night and day with tears of joy to the Lord, in humility and brokenness of heart. I saw into that which was without end, and things which cannot be uttered, and of the greatness and infinitude of the love of God, which cannot be expressed by words. . . . And a report went abroad of me, that I was a young man that had a discerning spirit; whereupon many came to me, from far and near, professors, priests, and people; and the Lord's power brake forth; and I had great openings and prophecies; and spake unto them of the things of God, and they heard with attention and silence, and went away, and spread the fame thereof."

After passing through the experience described above, Fox was mightily used of God, and great conviction of sin fell upon the people to whom he preached. "The Lord's power began to shake them," says he, "and great meetings we began to have, and a mighty power and work of God there was amongst people, to the astonishment of both people and priests." Later, he says, "After this I went to Mansfield, where was a great meeting of professors and people; here I was moved to pray ; and the Lord's power was so great, that the house seemed to be shaken."

Fox now went about the country preaching wherever he could find an opening. He frequently entered the "steeple-houses," as he called the State churches, and when the priest finished speaking he would arise and exhort the people. He often pointed out to them that their meeting-houses were not churches, but that the people who truly believed in Christ were the real church of God. The Friends never call their places of worship churches. They call them meeting-houses. Although Fox, or any other person, had a legal right to speak in the state churches when the priest had finished, so long as the rules of decency and order were observed, his speeches often led to controversies with the priests and others, and this often led to his arrest and frequently to his imprisonment. But as soon as he was set at liberty he began again to speak in the state churches or wherever he could find an open door. No amount of persecution or suffering seemed to dampen his zeal or cool his ardor. Many spiritually minded persons who were dissatisfied with the formalism of the times began to rally around him, and soon Societies of Friends were formed all over the country.

Notwithstanding all he suffered, Fox continued to advance in his own Christian experience, although he sometimes met with times of great temptation and trial. He seems to have frequently had real visions and revelations from the Lord, similar to those of Savonarola. While in a sort of trance or ecstasy, he seemed to discern many deep spiritual truths. "Great things did the Lord lead me into," says he, "and wonderful depths were opened unto me." Among other things which he claimed the Lord revealed to him were the medical properties of many herbs. That he really understood the medicinal properties of some herbs seems to be borne out by the fact that so many cures were attributed to the Quaker remedies that they soon became famous. Like Savonarola, Fox seems to have had a number of future events revealed to him. Thus, in 1664, he saw in vision the Lord's power checking the Westward advance of the Turks. On several occasions, while on the tops of mountains or hills, he had a vision of places in the surrounding country where Friends Societies would be raised up, or where "believers would be gathered" to him. He had a presentiment of the death of Oliver Cromwell just before the great commoner was called from this life.

A remarkable power seemed to accompany the preaching of Fox wherever he went, whether in Britain or America, Germany, Holland, or the West Indies. He usually went about the country on foot, dressed in his famous suit of leather clothes, said to have been made by himself, often sleeping out of doors or in some haystack. He was ridiculed and persecuted, beaten and stoned, arrested and imprisoned, more frequently perhaps than any other man, and yet the Lord seemed to greatly bless and own his labors. Describing his meetings at Ticknell, England, he says: "The priest scoffed at us and called us Quakers. But

the Lord's power was so over them, and the word of life was declared in such authority and dread to them, that the priest began trembling himself ; and one of the people said, "Look how the priest trembles and shakes, he is turned Quaker also".

In describing his meetings, Fox often uses words similar to the following: "And a precious meeting there was, wherein the Lord's power was over all; and the people were directed to the Spirit of God, by which they might come to know God and Christ, and understand the Scriptures aright," and so on. He also frequently uses words similar to the following : " Much work I had in those days, both with priests and people, concerning their old mass-houses, which they called their churches; for the priests had persuaded the people that it was the house of God; whereas the apostle says: 'Whose house are we,' etc (Heb. 3:8.) So the people are God's house, in whom He dwells. And the apostle saith, 'Christ purchased the church with His own blood:' and Christ calls His church His spouse, His bride, and the Lamb's wife: so that this title, church and spouse, was not given to an old house, but to His people, the true believers."

Describing an occasion when he spoke in Carlisle, Fox says: " The power of the Lord was dreadful among them in the steeple-house, so that the people trembled and shook; and some of them feared that it would fall down on their heads." Later, he says: "Now I went into the country, and had mighty great meetings. The everlasting gospel and word of life flourished, and thousands were turned to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to His teaching." At Sutton he spoke to a multitude of people. "A great conviction there was," says he, "and many hundreds were turned from darkness to the light," etc. Describing one of his meetings in another place, he says: "I stood a while before I began to speak; after some time I felt the power of the Lord go over the whole assembly; and His everlasting truth and life shown over all." Thus he went from place to place in Britain and other lands preaching the gospel with wonderful unction and power.

In spiritual matters Fox seems to have had a discernment far in advance of any other person of his day. Thus, while others were contending that the "body of sin" was the natural body, or body of flesh. Fox taught that the natural body was not the "body of sin" or we would not have been commanded to "put it off." While others called the days of the week and the months of the year by the names derived from heathen gods (Sunday, Monday; and January, February, etc.), the Quakers rejected these pagan names and called the days, " First Day, Second Day," etc., and the months, " First Month, Second Month," etc. They waited for the Holy Spirit to move them to speak, sing, or pray; and if no one felt led of the Spirit to take part in the meeting, the meetings were spent in silence and prayer, and would break up without a word being spoken.

The early Friends did not use the titles Mr. and Mrs, or Miss, but called each other by their given names, as though they were all members of one great family, as God's children truly are. Neither did they apply the title of Rev. to their ministers, or leaders, for they had no salaried ministers. In their dress, manners, language, and every other way they displayed a commendable simplicity and avoided extravagance. They seem to have had great power in prayer. Fox tells of cases in which sick people were healed and devils cast out in answer to prayer.

The great secret of Fox's own power was his faith in God. William Penn, the famous Quaker, wrote concerning him : " But above all, he excelled in prayer. The inwardness and weight of his spirit, the reverence and solemnity of his dress and behaviour, and the fewness and fullness of his words, have often struck even strangers, with admiration, and they used to reach others with consolation. The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his in prayer."

In his journal, Fox says: "The Lord had said unto me, 'If but one man or woman were raised up by His power, to stand and live in the same spirit that the apostles and prophets were in, who gave forth the Scriptures, that man or woman should shake all the country in their profession for miles around.' " This proved to be more than true in his case. He started with scarcely any advantages, and soon influenced the whole world for God. Although he began his preaching with a limited education, without any special training and without special advantages of any kind, he soon had England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales ablaze for God and his influence was powerfully exerted in America and other lands, and his followers are now numbered by the hundreds of thousands. Truly, in him we have an example of how God can use the weak things of the world to confound the mighty.

In personal appearance Fox was a large man, with remarkably piercing eyes. His eyes pierced sinners so that they could hardly endure to have him look at them, and his words were "like a flash of lightning." A remarkable spirit of discernment seems to have been given to him; so that he seemed to be able to read the characters of men by looking at them. The character of one appeared like that of a fox, of another, like that of a wolf, a serpent, a lion, or a wasp; and so on. His judgment was so clear and his logic so convincing that he seems to have always been able to confound the judges and magistrates before whom he was so frequently arraigned, although that fact did not save him from frequently going to prison for conscience sake. Even the Lord Chief Justice of England and the great Protector, Oliver Cromwell, seem to have been impressed by his arguments against the persecution of the Friends; although it was a long time before they secured exemption from the army and from taking judicial oaths.

The one great object of all George Fox's preaching and ministry was to turn the eyes of the people away from outward forms and ceremonies, and to direct them to the need of real holiness of heart and life. And such was also the real object of the ministry of Jesus. The entire Sermon on the Mount, all the parables of Jesus, and every word uttered by Him, was for the purpose of showing people that mere outward forms and ceremonies, or outward works of any kind, would not save them. He taught them that they must be pure in heart, meek in spirit, that they must love God and their neighbor, or they would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Neither Christ nor the apostles esteemed good works lightly when they taught that the outward deeds of the law would not save; but their object was to show the people the real need of inward holiness. So the great mission of George Fox and the Quakers was not to depreciate outward forms and ceremonies so much as to emphasize the need of inward purity and righteousness. In doing this they may have set too light a value on the outward ordinances prescribed in the Scriptures, but they accomplished their main object so well that the world owes to them a very great debt of gratitude. In the writings of such eminent Friends as George Fox, William Penn, Robert Barclay, and others, may be found some of the most helpful spiritual teachings outside the Word of God.