

**GEORGE FOX: AN
APOSTLE OF
EVANGELICAL,
SPIRITUAL CHRISTIANITY**

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George Fox: An Apostle of Evangelical, Spiritual Christianity by T. K. Jr.

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1874.

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It is wonderful to see how the lapse of time dispels our illusions, in regard to many of the world's heroes.

After the transient emergency, which called them forth from obscurity, has passed away, their popularity and even their very names are often equally forgotten.

Perhaps, too, some evidences of selfish motive or of personal weakness of character, come to light after their career has ended, which sadly tarnish the brightness of their fame, and weaken or destroy the reverence once felt for their example and their services.

This has even been the case too often with the heroes of the Christian Church; and to the causes already stated of the decline of their influence, are also to be added the errors of doctrine, which may, without intention, have crept into their teachings and which a more enlightened age discovers and rejects.

In one, or other, of these lists may be found

the names of several of the Reformers, and some even of the Martyrs of the Church, in past ages; and we charitably turn away from their failures and their errors of doctrine or practice, and try to think only of the good they have done,—the services they have rendered to the cause of civil or religious liberty or even of the gospel itself, in their day and generation.

With the subject of this notice, however, we claim that no such charitable consideration is asked or needed. His character stands to-day as pure, his authority as unshaken and elevated, his teachings as sound and unquestionable, as in the age when he startled all England with his trumpet call to the Church, to return to its primitive simplicity and purity.

It would seem that no recent progress of doctrine or practice in the Church at large, no more vivid realization of the scriptural obligations of the Christian religion, in its influence on the daily life of the believer, can disturb his theology, or even prove to be in advance of his actual example.

Has the light of Christianity revealed to its earnest believers everywhere, in our day, the inconsistency of slavery and intemperance with the gospel of Christ? George Fox preached and practised the same doctrines from his very boyhood. Nay more, he anticipated, and went far beyond, the present

conscience of the Christian Church, in regard to the fearful crime of national warfare and bloodshed, which has proved such a scourge to the world; and in many other points of Christian doctrine and practice, the church yet lags far behind his clear, ringing interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, in regard to the spiritual nature of the gospel of Christ.

Truly, as Robert Barclay declares, the truth so taught was "not a revelation of any new gospel, but it *was* a new revelation of the good old gospel;" and hence the safe and permanent character of the structure reared thereon.

What Tennyson says of England's great military captain, may more truthfully be declared of that pure, earnest, simple and yet eminently wise Christian reformer, George Fox:

"Whatever record leap to light,
He never shall be shamed."

I purpose to select from the writings of this distinguished man, some short definite expressions of the views which he held, and the doctrines which he promulgated, on some questions which are now agitating our branch of the Church; and on which his acknowledged authority has been, in some quarters, greatly misrepresented or misunderstood. In doing so, I would always make such extracts from

the earliest editions of his writings, conveniently accessible; believing that one great cause of the present confused condition of this branch of the Christian Church, in our land, has been the recent introduction of partial and modified editions of the lives and writings of members of our Society, who have long passed away.

However excellent the intentions of these modern compilers may have been, their practice has resulted in great detriment to the Truth itself, as well as in the most serious injustice to the characters of the parties so unintentionally misrepresented. Nay more, the injury has been lasting and widespread, to all those who have attempted to follow these imaginary examples, and to govern their own action, or to modify their own views, by an inflexible adherence to certain precise standards of doctrine and practice, thus incorrectly held forth for our imitation.

To such an extent has this been done that, instead of our forefathers being shown to us as they really were, (and, as Paul and Barnabas declared to the men of Lystra, they were also,) "men of like passions as ourselves," these eminent patterns of our human nature have been almost canonized as saints, and have been forced to appear in one uniform and impossible character.

Like the bed of Proustes, this ideal stand-

ard of these compilers must be conformed to by all their subjects; if they were too short for it, they were lovingly stretched to fit it, if they were too long, they were judiciously clipped to the needed measure; until all individuality of character and independence of thought, seem to have been lost sight of, in this artificial manipulation, by the modern biographers of our early Friends.

Our forefathers were noble men, of original cast of thought and independence of action; diverse in their views, not only on minor topics, but on important practical questions; yet with earnest convictions on many common doctrines, and with a wide Christian toleration for the diversities of opinion, appearance and practice, which prevailed amongst them.

Gathered in a few years from all grades of society and all stations in life, the rich and the poor, the learned and the uneducated, Cavaliers and Roundheads, Churchmen and Puritans, this diversity and this toleration were matters of necessity, and were universally understood by the community among whom they lived.

One of the sorrowful results of the great Unitarian heresy which, within fifty years past, has swept through the various branches of the Christian Church, and which actually divided our own, has been an entire confusion

of the offices and of the separate and distinct work of the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of the sinner and the believer respectively.

Many goodly people, who were not positively led away by that heresy, seem still to be tinctured with it, unconsciously to themselves; and they really believe, and accordingly so teach, that our early Friends held and promulgated the doctrine that, an unregenerate man, by the aid of the "light within," might gradually grow up from a state of nature into a state of grace. They say that, by this inner light, they can "work out their own salvation," and that the Holy Spirit teaches and guides the sinner, in the same manner as He teaches and guides the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now George Fox, the founder of our Society, held no such erroneous opinion, but proclaimed exactly the opposite doctrine. He taught that the light of Christ showed the sinner his lost and undone condition, and led him to Christ his Saviour, from whom that "light within" came; and that it was only when he had repented and believed the Gospel, and known his sins washed away in the blood of Christ, that the Holy Spirit became his teacher and guide and Comforter, as He always is of the believing child of God.

Of the many clear evidences of his belief and his teachings on this vitally important subject,