

**LIGHTS AND
SHADOWS OF
QUAKERISM**

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Lights and Shadows of Quakerism by Edward Ryder

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PAWLING, N. Y.

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1886

P R E F A C E .

Neither the Christian Public nor the World at large has ever adequately understood the phenomenon of Quakerism. It was a powerful movement in the direction of freedom of conscience and spirituality in religion—one of those numerous bursts of theistic force which in different ages have set the currents of human thought flowing on higher levels. The movement was marred near its commencement by certain peculiarities, and finally checked by a too rigid incrustation of the red-hot lava of reform, producing a new repression of the freedom the movement came to assert. This was due partly to the unripeness of the age, and partly to the nature of the minds acted upon. A century later Methodism met with better success by taking a less advanced position and holding it with more practical regard to the wants of the masses. The Quakers allowed their zeal to master their discretion, and by insisting on a too absolute standard of propriety shut themselves off from the multitude and stood still till the world went by them. Nor were they aware when the changes took place which left them contending about non-essentials

while the less punctilious divisions of the great army of the Cross moved on to the important business of saving souls. At length they began to perceive that what they had supposed to be their special and distinguishing doctrine, the light and guidance of the Spirit, was becoming the common creed of the Church. Active work and the steady rising of the Millennial Day had brought the general intelligence forward to a recognition of truths once apprehended by only a few persons.

Probably this common race-advancement goes on under certain general laws and influences, with much less dependence on local displays than we are apt to suppose. Bright days are a result of Spring, and not Spring a result of bright days. These early sunbursts often come weeks before the steady June weather. Then follows the certain reaction, and then another leap forward. We should not order it so, but that is God's fashion of putting away the wintry weather.

The following brief essays are designed to indicate both the advance and reaction in the great spiritual movement which occurred in the latter half of the seventeenth century. So rapid was its progress that in a few years England, Scotland, Ireland and the American Colonies were strongly tinged with the new doctrines, and several societies had been planted on the European Continent. The battle for liberty of conscience was fought and won, this time without

"carnal weapons." The name given in derision, became a title of respect. Wealth, ease, social position followed, and then came the reaction to a conservatism more stringent than that recently overpowered, followed by a decline as phenomenal as the sudden rise of the Society. The causes of this Decline have been the theme of numberless discussions both within the Body and among interested onlookers. A certain mystery seems to envelop the subject in most people's minds, giving it a kind of fascination apart from its serious importance. Naturally those most concerned cannot rest while doubtful of the causes that are paralyzing their best efforts to preserve their beloved Society and keep their children from straying into other folds.

This is another attempt to answer the inquiry in a way that may be beneficial not only to Friends but to others who can see a providential purpose in setting forth a beacon light for the advancing divisions of the Church Militant—a standard of spirituality perhaps in advance of what will be generally practicable for some time to come, but which, with its attendant dangers of excess, may profitably be kept in view by those who aim at intelligent and safe progress in religious culture.

Quaker Hill, N. Y., May 1, 1886.

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