

**RITUALISM AND
DOGMATIC THEOLOGY:
A SERIES OF ESSAYS**

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Ritualism and Dogmatic Theology: A Series of Essays by Thomas H. Speakman

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THOMAS H. SPEAKMAN

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RITUALISM
AND
DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

A Series of Essays

PUBLISHED IN 1872-3 IN FRIENDS' INTELLIGENCER AND
MANCHESTER FRIEND,

ON THE

CAUSES OF THE DECLENSION IN THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

NOW REPUBLISHED AS BEARING
ALSO ON THE SUBJECTS OF

CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
AND RATIONAL RELIGION.

BY
THOMAS H. SPEAKMAN.

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RITUALISM AND DOGMATIC THEOLOGY.

THE following essays were published as they appear, with but little alteration, in *Friends' Intelligencer*, of Philadelphia, and in the *Manchester Friend*, published at that time in Manchester, England. Owing to the scattered and irregular manner of their then publication, and the continued interest in the subject, it is thought worth while to reproduce them in this more connected form.

Persons, other than Friends, to whom the perusal of the pamphlet may be suggested by its being sent to them, may probably wonder at the intrusion. The excuse is, its bearing upon the general subject of evangelical theology and the now agitated question of the revision of creeds, and the desire to aid that much-needed reform; and hence, also, the new and broader heading now given.

By way of review of the general subject, a supplemental essay is now added.



THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

No. 1.

The State of Society.—Lack of Interest on Part of Members.—Extent of Declination.
—The Cause a Puzzle.—Prize for Best Essay on Subject.—Is the Cause Fundamental or Only Superficial?—As to Principles or Only Practices?

WE are accustomed to speak of the subjects brought up by the periodical answering of the queries laid down in the discipline of the several Yearly Meetings as, the state of Society, embracing the attendance of meetings and the maintenance of the several practical testimonies which the queries embrace; and there is in this connection, coming up from time to time, a subject which has long been one of anxious concern,—the lack of interest in Society affairs which is so apparent among a large proportion of our members, the gradual decline of many of our meetings, the actual discontinuance of some, and the diminution of our members generally.

However distasteful this topic may be, it presents a question which, under the solemn duty resting upon the active men and women of the present generation among Friends, must be fairly and fully met.

A brief review and comparison of the state of things existing among those claiming to be Friends, at the present time and at some former periods, will serve to show the need there is for earnest inquiry as to the cause of existing deficiencies, and the proper remedies for them.

The number of Friends in England toward the close of the seventeenth century has been estimated at some sixty thousand, or about one in one hundred and thirty of the population. Esti-

mates made within a few years past fix the number at about fourteen thousand, or one in eleven hundred of the population.

In the United States there has also been a declension everywhere among all bearing the name of Friends, except in one or more of the Western Orthodox Yearly Meetings, where recently there has been an increase,—accompanied, however, as the writer ventures to suggest, by a virtual abandonment of the religion of Friends. In the Yearly Meeting of Orthodox Friends of Philadelphia, according to their own account, there were laid down from 1831 to 1868 thirty per cent. of their meetings, and in numbers there was a decline from 1839 to 1868 of forty-two per cent.

In the Yearly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia there has been a decline of about one-fifth in numbers since the separation of 1827, while in the same time the surrounding population has more than doubled; and yet the decline has not been so much in numbers as in interest, as manifested in regard to the attendance of meetings and participation in Society affairs,—leaving out of view for the present the interest that has been created by the introduction in many places of First-Day Schools among our members, and other movements not recognized by the regular organization.

The subject of the gradual but uniform diminution in the numbers and relative influence of Friends everywhere during the last century has been one of much anxiety, not only to Friends themselves, but to others who are sensible of the beneficent influence they have exerted in times past, and might still exert, upon the world around them.

This decline having gone steadily on from year to year and for several generations, there arises something more than a presumption that Friends are themselves either unable to fathom the cause, or have thus far been incapable of applying a remedy, else they would not have suffered this state of things to continue so long. In any view that may be taken it is a question of very great importance and much difficulty, and requires for its solution

careful analysis and study of the nature of the religion professed by Friends, and a fearless and exhaustive inquiry as to how faithfully the present action of the Society accords with its principles and with enlightened reason. The investigation, like the probe and knife of the surgeon, guided by intelligence and a resolute hand, must proceed regularly and systematically to the root of the disease, regardless alike of ill-judged remonstrances and the infliction of incidental but unavoidable wounds.

This subject has excited more interest perhaps in England than it has in this country. Some twelve years ago a large reward was offered for the best Essay that should be written upon it, and certain persons were named as the judges. The announcement was made in the newspapers, at the time, in the following terms:

"SOCIETY OF FRIENDS—PRIZE ESSAY.

"A gentleman who laments that, notwithstanding the population of the United Kingdom has more than doubled itself in the last fifty years, the Society of Friends is less in number than at the beginning of the century, and who believes that the Society at one time bore a powerful witness to the world concerning some of the errors to which it is most prone, and some of the truths which are the most necessary to it, and that this witness has been gradually becoming more and more feeble, is anxious to obtain light respecting the causes of this change. He offers a prize of one hundred guineas for the best Essay that shall be written on the subject; and a prize of fifty guineas for the one next in merit. He has asked three gentlemen not members of the Society of Friends to pronounce judgment on the Essays which shall be sent to them. They have all some acquaintance with the history of the Society of Friends, and some interest in its existing members; and as they are likely to regard the subject from different points of view, he trusts that their decision will be impartial; that they will not expect to find their own opinions represented in the Essays; and that they will choose the one which exhibits most thought and Christian earnestness, whether it is favorable or unfavorable to the Society; whether it refers the diminution of its influence to degeneracy, to something wrong in the original constitution of the body, to the rules which it has adopted for its government, or to some extraneous cause."

In response to this offer many essays were written, some in this country, but mostly in England, and a number of them were printed. It is not necessary to specify which drew the prizes. Some of them contained many extremely pertinent and practical suggestions as to the causes of the low state of Friends in England, and pointed out reforms which were needed; and much can