

**QUAKERISM AS A
FACTOR IN THE RELIGIOUS
AND SOCIAL WORLD**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649234592

Quakerism as a Factor in the Religious and Social World by Henry Hartshorne

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Cover @ 2017

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A Lecture

IN THE SUMMER SCHOOL OF APPLIED ETHICS,
PLYMOUTH, MASS., 1895.

BY

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Philadelphia:

JOHN C. WINSTON,

51 NORTH SEVENTH ST.

1895.

C 8344.506.10
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QUAKERISM AS A FACTOR IN THE
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WORLD.

PERSPECTIVE in history is affected not only by standpoints and distances, but also by the atmosphere through which persons and events are regarded. As Arthur James Balfour has said, there are intellectual and emotional *climates*, discernible in different ages and countries, which modify men's beliefs more than all possible logical reasonings. Every man being a microcosm, there are individual mental climates. Quite different estimates, therefore, may be formed, among those who are now present, of the successive scenes which I wish to make prominent at the beginning of this lecture.

I would throw, as upon a screen before us, three pictures; two of them familiar to all readers, the third known only to those who wander among the unbeaten paths of religious literature.

First, we behold Henry IV., the proud young emperor of Germany, standing, in January, 1077, for three days, barefoot, and clad in a hair shirt, in an outer court of the castle of Canosa, awaiting permission to prostrate himself at the feet of Pope Gregory VII., and obtain remission of excommuni-

ication. Here we see the climax of the supremacy of the Roman hierarchy, on the claim of religious authority, over the secular powers of Europe.*

The next picture is a great contrast. It is April 18th, 1521. Martin Luther stands arraigned before an august tribunal of princes and prelates, the Diet of Worms. Refusing to retract anything that he had written, he says: "Prove from the writings of the prophets and apostles that I have erred. I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or the councils, because it is clear as the day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless, therefore, I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning, I cannot and will not retract." Having, four months sooner, burned at Wittenberg the bull of excommunication of Pope Leo X., Luther now proclaims the transfer of authority from the papacy to the Scriptures, interpreted by every one for himself, according to plain reason. Out of this transfer grew the Reformation.

Our third scene presents another contrast, also not without epochal significance. It is the year 1649; the year in which Charles I. was brought to the scaffold, the year after the Peace of Westphalia

* An early precedent for this was the humiliation of the Emperor Theodosius, 360 A.D., by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who compelled him to do abject public penance for a massacre at Thessalonica, before he would allow him to enter the basilica for worship.

had ended the thirty years' war between the Catholic and Protestant powers of Europe. At Nottingham, England, on the first day of the week, a minister is preaching to his congregation. A tall young man, of twenty-four years, with long hair, and bright, searching eyes, enters and listens; as he listens, his soul burns within him; until, using a liberty allowed by the custom of those unsettled times, he raises his voice in protest against the minister's interpretations. The story is best told in his own quaint and simple words:

"I went," he says, "to the steeple-house, and when I came there all the people looked like fallow ground; and the priest, like a great lump of earth, stood in his pulpit above. And he took for his text these words of Peter: 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.' And he told the people that this was the Scriptures, by which they were to try all doctrines, religions, and opinions. Now the Lord's power was mightily upon me, and so strong that I could not hold, but was made to cry out and say: 'Oh, no, it is not the Scriptures;' but I told them what it was, namely, the Holy Spirit, by which the holy men of God gave forth the Scriptures, whereby opinions, religions, and judgments were to be tried; for it led into all truth, and so gave the

knowledge of all truth. . . . Now as I spake thus among them, the officers came and took me away, and put me into a nasty, stinking prison, the smell whereof got so into my nose and throat that it very much annoyed me."

Very intrusive and objectionable this young man, George Fox, must have seemed to that minister, those officers, and that congregation. Yet, obscure man as he was, did he not open a new chapter in religious progress? Too soon it is now, perhaps it will be too much at any time, to say that he was as far in advance of Luther at Worms as Luther was beyond Henry IV. at Canosa. But Thomas Carlyle says, in *Sartor Resartus*: "Perhaps the most remarkable incident in modern history is not the Diet of Worms, still less the battle of Austerlitz, Waterloo, Peterloo, or any other battle, but George Fox's making to himself a suit of leather. This man, the first of the Quakers, and by trade a shoemaker*, was one of those to whom, under ruder or purer form, the Divine idea of the Universe is pleased to manifest itself, and across all the hulls of Ignorance and earthly degeneration shine through in unspeakable Awfulness, unspeakable Beauty, in their souls; who therefore are rightly accounted Prophets, God-possessed, or even Gods, as in some periods it has chanced."

* Really, however, a shepherd by vocation.

Surely we find in George Fox the farthest, indeed the farthest possible, advance in Protestantism, so long as it keeps not the name only, but the character of Christianity. At a time when the churches were formal and intolerant, and many of the ministers were "lumps of earth" like him of Nottingham, we see in Fox a man of inflexible integrity and purity of life and purpose, endeavoring to turn men from ceremonies and the outside of religion to its deep, practical reality. Reverencing and appealing for confirmation to the Scriptures, he pointed them beyond the Scriptures, teaching them the communion of the soul with God, without ritual, and without the intervention of a man-made priesthood; only the priesthood of all believers.

This protest of George Fox came at a time when, as William Penn wrote, "England was a benighted and bewildered nation." After a hundred years of the Reformation, the theory of "but one true church" had not passed out of men's minds; it has not passed away from half the Christian world yet; but to discover the true ideal of that church had then already become as difficult as the search for the Holy Grail. Puritanism was subdividing into Presbyterianism and Independency; Baptists, Seekers, Ranters, Anabaptists, Fifth Monarchy men, and others, were going their various ways, persecuting each other, as opportunity offered, with honest but unhappy zeal. One hundred and