

**"GEORGE FOX.": AN
ADDRESS DELIVERED TO
THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649012596

"George Fox.": An Address Delivered to the Society of Friends by C. H. Spurgeon

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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C. H. SPURGEON

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James F. Stabler, Jr.

“George Fox.”

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,

DEVONSHIRE HOUSE MEETING HOUSE, BISHOPSGATE STREET,
LONDON.

ON TUESDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 6TH, 1866.

CHARLES GILPIN, Esq., M. P., in the Chair.

FRIENDS,

WHEN first it was in my heart to address you, I did not at all suppose that it would be in the form of a lecture. I thought it possible, if God so ordered it, that I might have spoken to you for about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, upon a spiritual subject which for two or three years has pressed very heavily upon my mind. It seemed to me that you, esteemed Friends, were a picked body of men, peculiarly set apart to be the advocates of spiritual religion, that you had suffered long for it, that your history had been highly honorable to yourselves in years past, that you still loved the spirituality of godliness, and were not to be bewitched by the formalism of this age; but I thought that your testimony was hardly loud enough, that though it was clear as a bell, it was not shrill as a clarion; and I hoped also that if God should put it into your hearts to permit me to say a few earnest words to you, there might be young men amongst you who might be stirred up to lift up their voice like a trumpet, to cry aloud and spare not, and to tell to this age its sins and iniquities.

This has not happened, but I have been asked to deliver a lecture instead, and the topic chosen is George Fox. Now, to lecture Friends upon George Fox is an extraordinary proposition, and I do not at present see that I was prudent in my choice. You must all of you know much more about that honored man than I could possibly tell you, and I can only say that if you do not you should, for his “Life” well repays the earnest student.

It is a rich mine. Every page of it is precious as solid gold. Books now-a-days are hammered out, and you get but little metal in acres of leaf; but the "Journal" of George Fox contains ingots of gold, truths which require to be thought of month by month before you can get to the bottom of them. To talk to you about George Fox is bringing coals to Newcastle, and doing a work of supererogation; but nevertheless, as I am to do it—though it is not what I wanted to do—we must try to make a cross between what we wished and what is announced. We must have something like an address, and yet it must be a lecture; well then, I should not wonder if it be most like a sermon after all. I have heard of a man, a Harp Alley sign painter, who was in the habit of painting red lions, and had painted so many red lions, that when one day an innkeeper asked him to paint an angel, he said, "Well, I will paint you an angel, but it will be very much like a red lion." So, this "lecture," as it is to be called, will be very like a sermon, and yet not altogether very widely apart from an address or a lecture. I am amongst those who bear the name of "Friends." I have no doubt that you will honestly wear that title to night, and that I shall find you friends in listening to what I want to say. If I should find any fault with you, you will remember that you did not ask me to come here to flatter you, and I know you do not desire that I should do so. If I say anything that is wrong, you will put it down to my ignorance of the matter; but, at all events, you will not suspect me of unfriendliness, for I have no object in standing here to night but, in the fear of the Lord, to say some things which, by the Holy Spirit's power, may be useful to this audience, to your Society, and to the world.

I shall not be expected to-night to enter into the doctrinal opinions of George Fox. Many of you well know the opinions which I have set forth, and which I believe to be contained in God's Word; and you know also that these are very different from the theological teachings of George Fox. It would not be profitable to enter into controversy to-night, nor are we at all in the frame of mind for it, and I shall not, therefore, introduce any discussion of the doctrinal teachings of George Fox. Indeed, doctrinal teaching does not appear to me to have been George Fox's forte. We have to look to his successors and his immediate disciples for a fuller and clearer laying down of the theological basis of your Society, than we find in Fox himself. I look upon George Fox rather as a practical than as a doctrinal man, and as experimentally carrying out in his own life the work of the Spirit of God rather than as being a creed-ma-

ker, or as fashioning formulæ or framing propositions to which any man might be required to subscribe. I suppose that Fox would object to your own creed. I have the notion that he would object to any creed, as a creed; and that even if he agreed to what was laid down, he would object to its being laid down at all. I think he would say, "No, these things may be true enough, but, lest by any means this creed should be used to bind another man's conscience, I will not agree to it; I believe it and receive it, but I will not subscribe to it, lest it should become, as all creeds do become in process of time, mere dead letters and instruments of tyranny."

Looking through George Fox's life, and viewing him as the great champion of purely spiritual worship, one is inclined to say, with William Penn, that his epitaph might well be, "Many sons have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all;" for though in his own age and in his own time there were many bright stars, yet there were some points in which George Fox outshone them all. There were some particular truths which it was given to him to feel more intensely and to set forth more vehemently and constantly than any other man of his own time, or than any other man since his time, more especially the great truth that religion is of the spirit, that it is an inward thing, and is not to be judged, and weighed and accounted of according to the externals of a man but according to his inmost soul.

When George Fox appeared it was a singularly perilous age for true godliness, when a new band of witnesses must arise, or truth would be put to shame. Just as every year, early in the spring, you see the young buds appear, all green and vigorous, and then those young budlings swell until they burst into leaf and flower, but towards autumn begin to decay and fall, and other and younger buds follow them—so, very much has it been in the history of Christ's church in the world. There has blossomed in the church a body of spiritual men, full of vigor and freshness; these have endured a stern fight of afflictions, like the young buds in the early frosts of spring. They have borne it, they have grown under it, they have expanded, they have come to perfection, and there has been a delightful time of summer. But, alas! the decay of autumn has followed, and this vigor of godliness has declined, and another more spiritual band of men has followed them, pushed them off, and taken up their place. One band of men, fully spiritual, has for a time maintained the truth, but has then gradually declined through success; for so it is with human nature, that when we cease to be persecuted, when we get to feel that we are in easy circumstances, we lose the vigor of grace which we once possessed, and another and more

faithful brotherhood takes our place. Perhaps it will always be so, and after one backsliding generation there will arise a more earnest people, and another, and yet another, until the end of the dispensation, so that God shall never lack a spiritual seed in the world, to keep alive vital godliness.

Now it so happened that the Puritans, who had been like the spring buds and had blossomed, were getting into the sere and yellow leaf; and the Independents, and Baptists, and other sects, who were at one time thoroughly and even remarkably spiritual, were growing worldly, political, and vainglorious; the evangelical professors had come to feel that they were numerous and powerful; they had an opportunity of grasping the carnal sword; they embraced that opportunity, and from that moment very many of them lost the spirituality for which they had been eminent. The danger was lest the evangelical sects should quietly settle down in one State Church, make a scramble for the good things of the Ecclesiastical Establishment, and preach each one after its own fashion, in the numbness of death rather than in the power of life. It did not quite come to that, but it did seem as if it would do so. The very men who were once most vehement for liberty when they were down-trodden, were ready to put down others when they had the opportunity, and those who had vindicated the spirituality of Christ's religion were about to fall into formalism as soon as they had the opportunity of escaping from the galling yoke of oppression and persecution. At that very moment God sent into the world George Fox, who must have been the most troublesome of men to those good easy souls who counted upon a quiet season of sleep. They had said, "Soul, take thine ease; thou hast much goods laid up for many years." It was by the mouth of George Fox that God said to each one of them, "Thou fool!" Very soon declining professors found that another people would spring up to take their place, and that if they left the separated path and began to mingle with the world and to war with carnal weapons, God would find another people who should stand alone and vindicate his truth against all comers. George Fox, it seems to me, was a blessing, not to you alone, but to the whole of Christendom. He was sent of God, not only with a view to this Society in after years, but to the Christian church at large of that time, and to the church of God in all times. I do believe that under God, directly and indirectly, perhaps more indirectly than directly, George Fox was the means of driving out from their nests those who were very willing to have feathered those nests well, and to have taken their rest. He stood up in the face of the Christian Church, and said to it, "No, thou shalt not do this!

Thou shalt not conform thyself to the world ; thou shalt not go into an unholy alliance with the State ; there shall still be in the midst of thee a spiritual people who shall bear their protest that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, and that religion standeth not in forms and ceremonies, but is a matter connected with the inner man, and is the work of God's Spirit in the heart." You will judge, therefore, what my idea of Fox is when I have said that I look upon him as having been sent from our heavenly Father upon the important mission of saving the Christian church at a particular juncture, when, through having obtained the possession of State power, and being much exercised with the brawls of rival creeds and contentions upon outward ceremonies, the inward power was declining, and the church was likely to become absorbed into the world, or to set up a dead formalism which is neither acceptable to God nor serviceable to man.

Now, who was this man whom God thus raised up ? I cannot pretend to go through his life ; besides you know it all ; but if one might put a finger on one of the most beautiful events of his life, one would single out *his conversion*. He had a godly mother, but yet he needed conversion. He was an excellent lad, naturally disposed to everything that was serious, not at all given to the usual vanities of youth, not undutiful, not likely to run into vice, or even into ordinary follies ; and yet the truth was applicable to him. "Ye must be born again." He was not exactly the kind of child that we would wish all our children to be, for a little of the natural sportiveness of youth, when it is not associated with sin, makes the family hearth happy, and the prattle of childhood we would not restrain : George was a special child, a prophet in his youth, a Moses acceptable with God, and strangely enough, his parents thought to put him into the priesthood of the Church of England. As Moses' supposed parents would have made *him* king of Egypt, who was to be Egypt's greatest plague : so Fox's parents would fain have made him a helper of the Established Church, who was to help to tread it under foot. But notwithstanding the gentleness of his disposition and the excellence of his deportment, like our own children, he needed conversion, and that conversion, in God's grace, came. He has given us a very interesting account of how the Lord met with him in his solitary walks and musings ; how sometimes in a hollow tree, or in the open fields, God was pleased to reveal to him the disease of his nature, to direct him to the precious blood of Jesus, and to lead him to put his trust where I hope we are all resting, where we must rest if we would enter heaven, upon the finished work of our dear Redeemer. He was terribly depressed and cast down, just as most of God's children are

when first they arise and go to their Father. He was bewildered, perplexed and afflicted by those from whom he expected light and comfort. He tried to trust where you and I once looked in vain for succor, namely in an arm of flesh and in carnal confidences. He went to the supposed ministers of Christ, and found them to be miserable comforters. Some of them may have been real ministers of Christ, but they were either in a bad humor or were not skilled in dealing with disordered minds; at all events, they were not able to meet the peculiarly deep and solemn exercises of this singular young man, whose "verities" were as true as other men's oaths, and whose conscience was wounded by matters which were sport to less spiritual minds. He found one of these divines as hollow as an empty cask, and another told him to overcome his distress of mind by smoking tobacco and singing psalms. He obtained from a third what is most excellent advice to any young man who can afford it, the recommendation to get married; another bade him join the volunteers. "As he that poureth vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a sad heart." Poor remedies these for a distressed conscience! Alas for the physicians who prescribe tobacco smoke and bleeding as cures for a sin-sick soul! And yet what can the world do more for souls who are under the convincing power of God's Spirit? What remedies dost thou know of, poor blind world? Thou canst not open the eyes of thine own blind sons and daughters; how then canst thou lead the children of light in the way of peace? "One only hand, the pierced hand, can heal the sinner's woe." Fox, after going to one professor and another, inquiring as to this and that, at last found peace where we too found it, if we really have it, namely, from the love of the Lord Jesus. There is one passage in his "Journal" which has been quoted thousands of times, but you will not object to hear it again, it deserves to be printed in letters of gold.

"But, as I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the *most experienced people*; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hope in them and in all men was gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is One, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.' And when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition; namely, that I might give him all the glory. For all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who

enlightens and gives grace and faith and power. Thus when God doth work, who shall let it? And this I know experimentally. My desires after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God and of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book or writing."

All true conversions are after that same fashion essentially and radically. All men do not pass through the same depths of sorrow in coming to Christ, but they all have to come to him empty-handed, feeling that "Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." There must be a stripping before there will be a clothing; there must be an emptying of self before there can be a filling with the Spirit's power, and George Fox found it so. Have we all been led in this right way? How like the finding peace in the case of Fox is to the way in which John Bunyan describes it in his "Pilgrim's Progress." There stands the poor burdened wretch who fain would go on the pilgrimage to the Celestial City, but finds it hard work to toil thither while bowed down with a load of sin. He sees before the eye of his mind the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, and as he looks to the cross, suddenly the strings which hold his burden to his shoulders begin to crack, and the burden rolls into the sepulchre, so that he sees it no more. "Whereupon," writes Bunyan, "he gave three great leaps for joy, and went on his way singing." We have not forgotten those three great leaps which some of us gave in the day when Jesus took our sins away, when he became to us all our salvation and all our desire—Christ in us the hope of glory. It strikes me that George Fox would never have been the man he was, nor such an instrument in the hand of God for usefulness, if he had not been led about in the wilderness of self-despair, and made to see the dark chambers of imagery of his own natural heart. When our heavenly Captain means to use a sword, he passes it through a series of annealings to make the steel hard, so that it may not snap in the day of battle, and he passed George Fox through all these annealings in his inward conflicts. Why, how could he fear the face of man when he had feared the face of God, and been made to quake and tremble beneath his awful presence? He who has heard a lion roar will not shake at the voice of a sparrow or the buzz of a fly. Why should he tremble at what man could do to him when he had felt the arrows of the Almighty sticking in his heart and drinking up the life-blood of his soul? and a man who has had dealings with Almighty God, and has been in the secret place of thunder, and heard God's wrath go forth against him, and then inwardly seen the tempest spend itself upon the person of the Saviour, such a man can look