

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE
MEMOIRS
AND WRITINGS OF
JOSEPH JOHN GURNEY**

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An Examination of the Memoirs and Writings of Joseph John Gurney by Jr. Hodgson

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JR. HODGSON

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BY
WILLIAM HODGSON, JR.

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IN order rightly to appreciate the nature and tendency of the modifications of doctrine and practice, which have been so lamentably introduced into the Society of Friends during the present generation, we must recur to the original characteristics of our profession, as they are to be found in the lives, sufferings, testimonies and writings of the primitive Friends.

To the carnal mind, this profession must ever remain a great mystery—by the soaring intellect of man, strong in self-dependence, it will be undiscovered in its nature, though explained by all the arts of language—to the Jews it will ever be a stumbling block, and to the Greeks, foolishness—yet to those whose minds are humble enough to receive the truth “as a little child,” the great principle at the root of the profession of this people will be found to be, “Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God”—even that wisdom, which, though hidden from ages and from generations, is still, as it was two hundred years ago, made manifest to his dependent and obedient children.

The religion of our forefathers was nothing more nor less than “primitive Christianity revived.” It was, and is, a religion for the heart broken under the sense and weight of sin; for the spirit contrited in deep humility before the Lord; for

the mind weaned from the world, but taught of God, and faithful to the Light of His Holy Spirit; for the soul buried with Christ by baptism unto the death of the first Adam, crucified with Christ, renewed by the power of His resurrection, sanctified by His Spirit, and justified by the efficacy of His blood, preserved and strengthened by His Life, and enabled, through obedience to the manifestations of His good Spirit shed abroad in the heart, to walk in acceptance with the Father. It was no half-way work which our forefathers bore testimony unto. The spirit of the world was to be totally renounced and shut out—self-dependence was to be entirely brought down—and the Word nigh in the heart, the engrafted Word, the Emanuel, God with us, Christ within the hope of glory, was to be looked to in faith and faithfulness, without reasoning with flesh and blood.

In reference to the revival of this pure profession of Christianity by means of the ministry of Geo. Fox, and his fellow-labourers, Wm. Penn says, (*Rise and Prog.*, p. 20.) "That which people had been vainly seeking *without*, with much pains and cost, they by this ministry found *within*, where it was they wanted what they sought for, viz: the right way to peace with God. For they were directed to the Light of Jesus Christ within them, as the seed and leaven of the Kingdom of God; near all, because in all, and God's talent to all; a faithful and true witness, and just monitor in every bosom; the gift and grace of God, to life and salvation, that appears to all, though few regard it."

(p. 23.) "And as their testimony was to the principle of God in man, the precious pearl and leaven of the Kingdom, as the only blessed means appointed of God to quicken, convince and sanctify man, so they opened to them what it was in itself, and what it was given to them for; how they might know it from their own spirit, and that of the subtle appearance of the evil one; and what it would do for all those whose minds are turned off from the vanity of the world, and its lifeless ways and teachers, and adhere to this blessed Light in themselves, which discovers and condemns sin in all its appearances, and shows how to overcome it, if minded and obeyed in its holy manifestations and convictions, &c."

(p. 24.) "But these experimental preachers of glad tidings of God's truth and kingdom, could not run when they list, or

pray or preach when they pleased; but as Christ their Redeemer prepared and moved them by his own blessed Spirit; for which they waited in their services and meetings, and spoke as that gave them utterance; and which was as those having authority, and not like the dreaming, dry and formal Pharisees."

(p. 26.) "I have already touched upon their fundamental principle, which is as the corner-stone of their fabric; and, indeed, to speak eminently and properly, their characteristic, or main distinguishing point or principle, viz: The light of Christ within, as God's gift for man's salvation. This, I say, is as the root of the goodly tree of doctrines that grew and branched out from it, &c."

And further, in regard to these primitive ministers, he adds: (p. 47,) "they were changed men themselves, before they went about to change others. Their hearts were rent, as well as their garments; and they knew the power and work of God upon them. And this was seen by the great alteration it made, and their stricter course of life and more godly conversation that immediately followed upon it.

"They went not forth, or preached in their own time or will, but in the will of God; and spoke not their own studied matter, but as they were opened and moved of his Spirit; with which they were well acquainted in their own conversion; which cannot be expressed to carnal men, so as to give them any intelligible account; for to such, it is, as Christ said, like the blowing of the wind, which no man knows whence it cometh, or whither it goeth. Yet this proof and seal went along with their ministry, that many were turned from their lifeless professions, and the evil of their ways, to an inward and experimental knowledge of God, and an holy life, as thousands can witness. And as they freely received what they had to say from the Lord, so they freely administered it to others."

And, (p. 52,) he mentions the following, as being what they had to declare of the "primitive message, revived in their spirits, by the good Spirit and power of God, viz: That God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; and that He has sent his Son a light into the world, to enlighten all men in order to salvation; and that they that say they have fellowship with God, and are his children and people, and yet walk

in darkness, (viz: in disobedience to the light in their consciences,) and after the vanity of this world, they lie, and do not the truth. But that all such as love the light, and bring their deeds to it, and walk in the light, as God is light, the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, should cleanse them from all sin."

Afterwards, speaking of the people gathered by this ministry, Wm. Penn says, (p. 81:) "We held the truth in the spirit of it, and not in our own spirits, or after our own will and affections; they were bowed and brought into subjection, insomuch that it was visible to them that knew us. We did not think ourselves at our own disposal, to go where we list, or say or do what we list, or when we list. Our liberty stood in the liberty of the Spirit of Truth; and no pleasure, no profit, no fear, no favour could draw us from this retired, strict and watchful frame. We were so far from seeking occasions of company, that we avoided them what we could; pursuing our own business with moderation, instead of meddling with other people's, unnecessarily. Our words were few and savoury, our looks composed and weighty, and our whole deportment very observable. True it is, that this retired and strict sort of life from the liberty of the conversation of the world, exposed us to the censures of many, as humourists, conceited, and self-righteous persons, &c. But it was our preservation from many snares, to which others were continually exposed, by the prevalency of the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, that wanted no occasions or temptations to excite them abroad in the converse of the world, &c."

To the same purport is the testimony given by Robert Barclay, in his "Apology for the true Christian Divinity;" (Prop. vi. sect. 24,) where, speaking of the Society in that day, he says:

"Glory to God forever! who hath chosen us as first-fruits to Himself in this day, wherein He is arisen to plead with the nations, and therefore hath sent us forth to preach this everlasting gospel unto all, Christ nigh to all, the Light in all, the Seed sown in the hearts of all, that men may come and apply their minds to it. And we rejoice that we have been made to lay down our wisdom and learning, (such of us as have had some of it,) and our carnal reasoning, to learn of Jesus; and

sit down at the feet of Jesus in our hearts, and hear him, who there makes all things manifest, and reproveth all things by His Light. (Eph. v. 13.) For many are wise and learned in the notion, in the letter of the Scripture, as the Pharisees were, and can speak much of Christ, and plead strongly against infidels, Turks, and Jews, and it may be also against some *heresies*, who, in the meantime, are crucifying Christ in the small appearance of his seed in their hearts. Oh! better were it to be stripped and naked of all, to account it as dross and dung, and become a fool for Christ's sake, thus knowing Him to teach thee in thy heart, so as thou mayst witness him raised there, feel the virtue of his cross there, and say with the apostle, I glory in nothing, save in the cross of Christ, whereby I am crucified to the world, and the world unto me. This is better than to write thousands of commentaries, and to preach many sermons. And it is thus to preach Christ, and direct people to his pure Light in the heart, that God hath raised us up; and for which the wise men of this world account us fools; because by the operation of this cross of Christ in our hearts, we have denied our own wisdom and wills in many things, and have forsaken the vain worships, fashions, and customs of this world." * * * *

"But some, confiding in an external, barren faith, think all is well, if they do but firmly believe that He died for their sins past, present, and to come; while in the meantime Christ lies crucified and slain, and is daily resisted and gainsaid in his appearance in their hearts. Thus, from a sense of this blindness and ignorance that is come over Christendom, it is that we are led and moved of the Lord so constantly and frequently to call all, invite all, request all, to turn to the light in them, to mind the light in them, to believe in Christ, as he is in them: and that in the name, power, and authority of the Lord, not in school-arguments and distinctions, (for which many of the wise men of this world account us fools and mad-men,) we do charge and command them to lay aside their wisdom, to come down out of that proud, airy, brain-knowledge, and to stop that mouth, how eloquent soever to the worldly ear it may appear, and to be silent, and sit down as in the dust, and to mind the light of Christ in their own consciences: which, if minded, they would find as a *sharp two-edged sword* in their