

THE ADVENT OF QUAKERISM

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The Advent of Quakerism by John Pease Fry

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JOHN PEASE FRY

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OF QUAKERISM**

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BY

JOHN PEASE FRY, M.A.

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PREFACE.

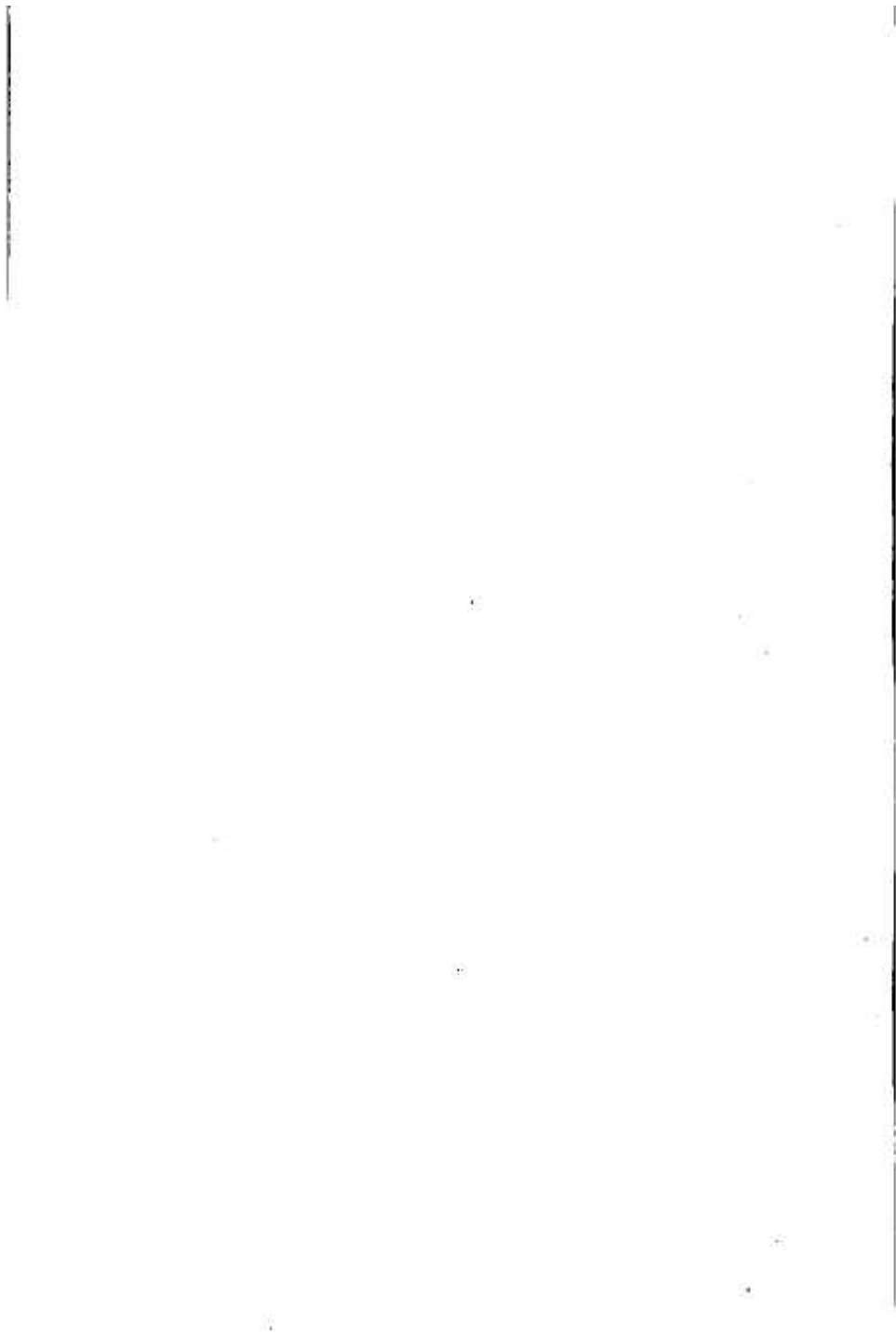
THIS paper was written at the request of the Secretary of the Friends' Home Mission and Extension Committee, to be used as one of a Series of Lectures in the furtherance of its objects, and though not originally intended for publication, it has been left unaltered.

The writer desires to acknowledge his indebtedness to those from whose books he has quoted—such, especially, are: T. E. Harvey's "Rise of the Quakers"; E. E. Taylor's "Cameos from the Life of George Fox"; Robert Barclay's "Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth," etc.

The other Lectures of the Series now ready are: "The Life of George Fox" and "Early Friends as Social Pioneers" ("Elizabeth Fry, the Prisoners' Friend," and "William Penn" to follow), all of which are illustrated by Lantern Slides. About forty have been obtained for this particular paper, and these or any of the others may be borrowed on application to The Secretary,

FRIENDS' HOME MISSION AND EXTENSION COMMITTEE,
15, DEVONSHIRE STREET,
BISHOPSGATE WITHOUT,
LONDON, E.C.

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THE ADVENT OF QUAKERISM.

IT has been well said of Early Quakerism that its history is the history of a movement and not of a man. This movement, as we shall see, was towards a more simple and more spiritual form of religion than that provided by the reformed Churches of Germany, England or Scotland, or indeed by any of the numerous dissenting bodies in this country. The man in question was, of course, George Fox, "the man with the leather breeches," whose name is inseparably connected with Quakerism, and who is popularly known as the first Quaker.

Before we can properly appreciate his work, we must take a brief glance of the times in which he lived, and must look rather more carefully at the state of the reformed religion on the Continent and at home.

The Protestant Reformation on the Continent was begun in 1520 by Martin Luther, a monk of Erfurt, in Germany, and ended in the secession of a very large proportion of the people from the Church of Rome, and in the establishment of the Lutheran Church; that is, of the Protestant Church, freed from many of the false doctrines and abuses that had become part and parcel of the Roman religion.

But in Germany this reformation was not carried to its logical conclusion, partly no doubt because the clerical leaders of the movement were unable to free themselves entirely from the traditions in which they had been brought up, and partly because they were so largely dependent on the arm of flesh for their support. In other words, they had to rely on the help of those kings and princes whom they were able to win over to their side, and they were consequently never able to free themselves or their religion from the domination and interference of the state, so the Protestant Church remained as the Roman was before, and still is, paralysed by its craving for temporal power. It was largely as a result of this that Luther took up the attitude he finally adopted in 1525 in regard to the Reformation, viz., that it must proceed from without inwardly, and as to the Sacraments, that God had resolved to give no one the inward things save through the outward.

There were, however, in Germany, a number of spiritually-minded persons who saw that the Lutheran Reformation had stopped far short of the logical goal, and that the new church did not imitate the pattern set by the early believers. Among these, one of the foremost was Caspar Schwenkenfeld, a Silesian noble, a man of the most devoted life and character, who taught that the worship of God must be in Spirit and in Truth, and who held, in opposition to Luther, that the inward change must come before the outward things of Christianity could be rightly used, that the Sacraments were at least unnecessary, and whose views were also identical

with those of the Society of Friends, as regards the Inner Light and Immediate Revelation. There are to-day in America some eight hundred Schwenkenfeldians, whose ancestors emigrated there in search of religious liberty. Another and much larger body was that of the Mennonites, whose headquarters were at Amsterdam, in Holland. This sect was founded by Menno Simons in 1537, and though there were several points in which the views of the Mennonites differed from those of Friends, they were in the main similar. Silence was the basis of united meetings for worship, and generally in views and practice they sought to approximate to the pattern of the early Christian Church. Even before this date there were Baptists in Switzerland, and it seems that the church discipline of the Mennonites was borrowed from them. There was at that time a close intercourse between England and Holland, and it cannot be doubted that the teachings of those bodies of Protestants on the Continent who endeavoured to make the Reformation a truly spiritual one, had a far-reaching effect on the religious life of England. By 1626 there were churches at London, Lincoln, Sarum, and Coventry, on the lines of the Dutch Mennonites, and in correspondence with them, and evidence has been adduced to show that George Fox himself was not ignorant of, or insensible to, these influences. It is, however, safe to say that, whether he was aware of the existence of these sects at the commencement of his ministry or not, he preached and taught views in harmony with theirs, and that they had been in existence for *several* decades before he appeared upon the scene.