

**THE DOCTRINES OF THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS, AS SET
FORTH IN THE LIFE AND
WRITINGS OF THOMAS STORY**

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The Doctrines of the Society of Friends, as Set Forth in the Life and Writings of Thomas Story by
Thomas Story

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BRIEF MEMOIR
OF
THOMAS STORY.

OF all those firm upholders of the truth, whose writings have come down to us out of the half-forgotten past, we know of few, if any, better adapted to illustrate the Christian principles of the religious society of Friends than Thomas Story,—one in whom seem to have been combined the earnest, unwavering faith of a true gospel minister, with the sound reasoning and clear discrimination of a man of high intellectual attainments.

In offering to the reader a brief outline of his biography, with selections from his writings, our hope is to draw to them the attention and thoughtful consideration of some who might not have time or inclination to peruse them at large.

Before coming, however, to the matter immediately in hand, a few general observations, bearing upon the subject, may not be out of place in this connection. An inward, invisible, spiritual Church, walking by faith, and not by sight, and merged in, or surrounded by, another outward or ceremonial religious system, is clearly discernible far back in the history of our race. In the days of Elijah the Prophet, the Priest

and the Levite, who should have been shepherds of the flock, had fled from their posts, and the great mass of the chosen people, with their wicked rulers, were left to worship Baal in the groves and upon the high places; yet were there in Israel seven thousand souls who bowed not down to the false idol, but continued faithfully serving the God of their fathers.

Long ages after, as we follow down the history of the same wondrous people, who then, as formerly, may be considered as representing the outward Church, we shall find the priests and high professors of the day ready to deliver up the Saviour of mankind to the scourge and the cross; and only a few poor fishermen and weeping women followed afar off, fearful and trembling, but faithful unto death. Again, in after-years, and under a new dispensation, while Rome's proud hierarchy stood with their feet upon the necks of kings, and from her stately temples mocked Christianity with half-heathen rites, a few poor peasants, hunted through caves and forests, still testified at the gibbet and the stake that God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. These true believers, thus following after the light that was still clearly shining for them, though all around was darkness, kept alive, through the long night of apostasy, a feeble remnant of the real Church until the dawning of a brighter day, — that glorious epoch, when the Holy Scriptures, buried for ages in an unknown language, was given to the people in their mother tongue. The long-imprisoned utterances of the

Spirit, bursting forth like a mighty earthquake, shook Europe to her centre for half a century; nor did the good work cease until that most cunningly devised system which, by availing itself of the intense longing of the human soul for a Church universal, broad enough to take in the whole race, and by substituting for such a Church those false rites and shadowy symbols, had so long held all Christendom under her iron rule, was cast down from her high places, and a new and far purer system, though still not perfect, took its place. In short, the Reformation had been brought about; a work great and glorious indeed had been wrought out in the earth, yet far short, evidently, of a restoration of the Church to her condition in apostolic times. The various sects calling themselves Protestants, as protesting against the abuses of Rome, yet widely differing among themselves in many particulars, all united in retaining certain outward ordinances, and, with these ordinances, a separate, paid body of men to administer them, called by various names, but in reality (to all intents and purposes) a priesthood, a large body of them claiming and appropriating to themselves, as successors of the sons of Levi under a former dispensation, a tenth part of all that the people possessed. Such a priestly order, we contend, is incompatible with Christianity as established by its blessed Founder. One Priest we have, eternal in the Heavens, even Christ, and need no other. Out of *Judah* was to come no priest, but out of *Levi*, which priesthood is passed away. In the

primitive Christian Church was no separate order of men corresponding to what is now called the clergy; but the gifts of the Holy Spirit fell on all true members, but not the same gifts to all: to one, prophecy or preaching, to another, teaching, and various other gifts, as of tongues, &c. Nor did they teach or preach at their own fixed times and seasons, but spake only as they were moved of the Holy Ghost.

Such a Church, we believe, Christ founded upon earth then; and such ought to be his Church to-day; for hath he not declared, "Lo, I am with you, even unto the end of the world"? Let us search and examine if there has been since the days of Paul, or if there be now, any sect, calling themselves Christian, who seek after and believe in a Church with these good gifts.

Our subject now demands that we leave these general observations, and turn our attention to the British islands, and to a most memorable epoch in their religious as well as their political history. The period to which we refer is the first half of the seventeenth century, the eve of that revolution which was to result in the overthrow of absolute monarchy in England, and in the death of the ill-fated prince who strove so blindly to contend against the [righteous] indignation of a long-suffering and persecuted people. With this great social revulsion were brought to the surface new and strange religious doctrines. The Episcopal or established Church, in the downfall of the secular power with which it had been so long

allied, soon lost its ancient prestige, and a host of would-be reformers made their appearance on the stage. Presbyterianism would fain have clad herself in the mantle which was falling from the shoulders of the Prelacy, and have seated herself in high places. This consummation was, however, prevented by the prominent position now taken by a third sect, differing as widely in its peculiar tenets from the Presbyterians as did the former from the ancient establishment. These last—the Independents, as they were called—professed a new and peculiar doctrine: no written creeds or confessions of faith had been transmitted from a former generation to this band of stern enthusiasts: holding the belief that the only real source of knowledge in relation to religion was to be found in an inward revelation, they possessed no settled clergy. Any member of their society, professing to have received the gift of preaching from an inward, spiritual revelation, was listened to with the deepest reverence, as delivering an inspired message. It was no unusual thing in the army of the Commonwealth (whose ranks were principally recruited from the sect described) for generals to preach at the head of their divisions, captains to their companies, or even private soldiers to such of their fellows as were disposed to hear them.

In such a state of affairs, it would be natural to look for a general toleration of religious opinion; but such does not appear to have been the case. Churchmen, Presbyterians, and Independents were equally

ready to persecute each other, and all who might hold religious opinions at variance with their own special dogmas.

As the primitive Christian Church never persecuted for conscience' sake, and since the Saviour has himself declared that his kingdom was not of this world, neither was to be set up and sustained by war and bloodshed, no one of these religious bodies can with justice claim to have been thorough reformers, or to have restored in any great degree that Christianity which characterized the Church in the days of the apostles. As has been the case throughout all time, we are not to look among the great and the powerful for those deep things of the Spirit, which have been ever hidden from the wise and prudent of this world but have been made plain to all who were lowly and simple-hearted.

In the same year that the royal standard of King Charles I. had been set up on the castle of Nottingham, a young man, the son of one Christopher Fox, a weaver of Drayton, in Leicestershire, began to attract the attention of the community in which he lived, by his singular behavior. Born in 1624, he had about this period—the year 1642—attained his nineteenth year. Even in his early childhood he had been remarkable for the gravity of his deportment, for the endeavors he made to live a pure and righteous life, and for his rigid regard for the truth in all his communications. Up to the period referred to, he had resided at home with his