

GEORGE FOX - An Autobiography

CHAPTER II. The First Years of Ministry

1648-1649

Chapter II

After this³⁴ I went to Mansfield, where was a great meeting of professors and people. Here I was moved to pray; and the Lord's power was so great that the house seemed to be shaken. When I had done, some of the professors said it was now as in the days of the apostles, when the house was shaken where they were.³⁵ After I had prayed, one of the professors would pray, which brought deadness and a veil over them; and others of the professors were grieved at him and told him it was a temptation upon him. Then he came to me, and desired that I would pray again; but I could not pray in man's will.

Soon after there was another great meeting of professors, and a captain, whose name was Amor Stoddard, came in. They were discoursing of the blood of Christ; and as they were discoursing of it, I saw, through the immediate opening of the invisible Spirit, the blood of Christ. And I cried out among them, and said, "Do ye not see the blood of Christ? See it in your hearts, to sprinkle your hearts and consciences from dead works, to serve the living God"; for I saw it, the blood of the New Covenant, how it came into the heart.³⁶

This startled the professors, who would have the blood only without them, and not in them. But Captain Stoddard was reached, and said, "Let the youth speak; hear the youth speak"; when he saw they endeavoured to bear me down with many words.

There was also a company of priests, that were looked upon to be tender; one of their names was Kellett; and several people that were tender went to hear them. I was moved to go after them, and bid them mind the Lord's teaching in their inward parts. That priest Kellett was against parsonages then; but afterwards he got a great one, and turned a persecutor.

Now, after I had had some service in these parts, I went through Derbyshire into my own county, Leicestershire, again, and several tender people were convinced.

Passing thence, I met with a great company of professors in Warwickshire, who were praying, and expounding the Scriptures in the fields. They gave the Bible to me, and I opened it on the fifth of Matthew, where Christ expounded the law; and I opened the inward state to them, and the outward state; upon which they fell into a fierce contention, and so parted; but the Lord's power got ground.

Then I heard of a great meeting to be at Leicester, for a dispute, wherein Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and Common-prayer-men³⁷ were said to be all concerned. The meeting was in a steeple-house; and thither I was moved by the Lord God to go, and be amongst them. I heard their discourse and reasonings, some being in pews, and the priest

in the pulpit; abundance of people being gathered together.

At last one woman asked a question out of Peter, What that birth was, viz., a being born again of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever? And the priest said to her, "I permit not a woman to speak in the church"; though he had before given liberty for any to speak. Whereupon I was wrapped up, as in a rapture, in the Lord's power; and I stepped up and asked the priest, "Dost thou call this (the steeple-house) a church? Or dost thou call this mixed multitude a church?" For the woman asking a question, he ought to have answered it, having given liberty for any to speak.

But, instead of answering me, he asked me what a church was? I told him the church was the pillar and ground of truth, made up of living stones, living members, a spiritual household, which Christ was the head of; but he was not the head of a mixed multitude, or of an old house made up of lime, stones and wood.³⁸

This set them all on fire. The priest came down from his pulpit, and others out of their pews, and the dispute there was marred. I went to a great inn, and there disputed the thing with the priests and professors, who were all on fire. But I maintained the true church, and the true head thereof, over their heads, till they all gave out and fled away. One man seemed loving, and appeared for a while to join with me; but he soon turned against me, and joined with a priest in pleading for infant-baptism, though himself had been a Baptist before; so he left me alone. Howbeit, there were several convinced that day; the woman that asked the question was convinced, and her family; and the Lord's power and glory shone over all.

After this I returned into Nottinghamshire again, and went into the Vale of Beavor.³⁹ As I went, I preached repentance to the people. There were many convinced in the Vale of Beavor, in many towns; for I stayed some weeks amongst them.

One morning, as I was sitting by the fire, a great cloud came over me, and a temptation beset me; and I sat still. It was said, "All things come by nature"; and the elements and stars came over me, so that I was in a manner quite clouded with it. But as I sat still and said nothing, the people of the house perceived nothing. And as I sat still under it and let it alone, a living hope and a true voice arose in me, which said, "There is a living God who made all things."⁴⁰ Immediately the cloud and temptation vanished away, and life rose over it all; my heart was glad, and I praised the living God.

After some time I met with some people who had a notion that there was no God, but that all things come by nature. I had a great dispute with them, and overturned them, and made some of them confess that there is a living God. Then I saw that it was good that I had gone through that exercise.⁴¹ We had great meetings in those parts; for the power of the Lord broke through in that side of the country.

Returning into Nottinghamshire, I found there a company of shattered Baptists, and others. The Lord's power wrought mightily, and gathered many of them. Afterwards I went to Mansfield and thereaway, where the Lord's power was wonderfully manifested both at Mansfield and other towns thereabouts.

In Derbyshire the mighty power of God wrought in a wonderful manner. At Eton, a town near Derby, there was a meeting of Friends,⁴² where appeared such a mighty power of God that they were greatly shaken, and many mouths were opened in the power of the Lord God. Many were moved by the Lord to go to steeple-houses, to the priests and people, to declare the everlasting truth unto them.

At a certain time, when I was at Mansfield, there was a sitting of the justices about hiring of servants; and it was upon me from the Lord to go and speak to the justices, that they should not oppress the servants in their wages. So I walked towards the inn where they sat; but finding a company of fiddlers there, I did not go in, but thought to come in the morning, when I might have a more serious opportunity to discourse with them.

But when I came in the morning, they were gone, and I was struck even blind, that I could not see. I inquired of the innkeeper where the justices were to sit that day; and he told me, at a town eight miles off. My sight began to come to me again; and I went and ran thitherward as fast as I could. When I was come to the house where they were, and many servants with them, I exhorted the justices not to oppress the servants in their wages, but to do that which was right and just to them; and I exhorted the servants to do their duties, and serve honestly.⁴³ They all received my exhortation kindly; for I was moved of the Lord therein.

Moreover, I was moved to go to several courts and steeple-houses at Mansfield, and other places, to warn them to leave off oppression and oaths, and to turn from deceit to the Lord, and to do justly. Particularly at Mansfield, after I had been at a court there, I was moved to go and speak to one of the most wicked men in the country, one who was a common drunkard, a noted whore-master, and a rhyme-maker; and I reprov'd him in the dread of the mighty God, for his evil courses.

When I had done speaking, and left him, he came after me, and told me that he was so smitten when I spoke to him, that he had scarcely any strength left in him. So this man was convinced, and turned from his wickedness, and remained an honest, sober man, to the astonishment of the people who had known him before.

Thus the work of the Lord went forward, and many were turned from the darkness to the light, within the compass of these three years, 1646, 1647 and 1648. Diverse meetings of Friends, in several places, were then gathered to God's teaching, by his light, Spirit, and power; for the Lord's power broke forth more and more wonderfully.

Now I was come up in spirit through the flaming sword, into the paradise of God. All things were new; and all the creation gave unto me another smell than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness; being renewed into the image of God by Christ Jesus, to the state of Adam, which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me; and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue.

I was at a stand in my mind whether I should practise physic for the good of mankind, seeing the nature and virtues of things were so opened to me by the Lord. But I was immediately taken up in spirit to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus that should never fall. And the Lord showed me that such as were faithful to Him, in the power and light of Christ, should come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell; in which the admirable works of the creation, and the virtues thereof, may be known, through the openings of that divine Word of wisdom and power by which they were made.

Great things did the Lord lead me into, and wonderful depths were opened unto me, beyond what can by words be declared; but as people come into subjection to the Spirit of God, and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the Word of wisdom that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being.⁴⁴

Thus I travelled on in the Lord's service, as He led me. When I came to Nottingham, the mighty power of God was there among Friends.⁴⁵ From thence I went to Clawson, in Leicestershire, in the Vale of Beavor; and the mighty power of God appeared there also, in several towns and villages where Friends were gathered.

While I was there the Lord opened to me three things relating to those three great professions in the world, -- law, physic, and divinity (so called). He showed me that the physicians were out of the wisdom of God, by which the creatures were made; and knew not the virtues of the creatures, because they were out of the Word of wisdom, by which they were made. He showed me that the priests were out of the true faith, of which Christ is the author, -- the faith which purifies, gives victory and brings people to have access to God, by which they please God; the mystery of which faith is held in a pure conscience. He showed me also that the lawyers were out of the equity, out of the true justice, and out of the law of God, which went over the first transgression, and over all sin, and answered the Spirit of God that was grieved and transgressed in man; and that these three, -- the physicians, the priests, and the lawyers, -- ruled the world out of the wisdom, out of the faith, and out of the equity and law of God; one pretending the cure of the body, another the cure of the soul, and the third the protection of the property of the people. But I saw they were all out of the wisdom, out of the faith, out of the equity and perfect law of God.

And as the Lord opened these things unto me I felt that His power went forth over all, by which all might be reformed if they would receive and bow unto it. The priests might be reformed and brought into the true faith, which is the gift of God. The lawyers might be reformed and brought into the law of God, which answers that indwelling Spirit of God⁴⁶ which is in every one, is transgressed in every one, and which yet, if heeded brings one to love his neighbour as himself. This lets man see that if he wrongs his neighbour, he wrongs himself; and teaches him to do unto others as he would they should do unto him. The physicians might be reformed and brought into the wisdom of God, by which all things were made and created; that they might receive a right knowledge of the creatures, and understand their virtues, which the Word of wisdom, by which they were made and are upheld, hath given them.

Abundance was opened concerning these things; how all lay out of the wisdom of God, and out of the righteousness and holiness that man at the first was made in. But as all believe in the Light, and walk in the Light, -- that Light with which Christ hath enlightened every man that cometh into the world, -- and become children of the Light, and of the day of Christ, all things, visible and invisible, are seen, by the divine Light of Christ, the spiritual heavenly man, by whom all things were created.

Moreover, when I was brought up into His image in righteousness and holiness, and into the paradise of God He let me see how Adam was made a living soul; and also the stature of Christ, the mystery that had been hid from ages and generations: which things are hard to be uttered, and cannot be borne by many. For of all the sects in Christendom (so called) that I discoursed with, I found none who could bear to be told that any should come to Adam's perfection, -- into that image of God, that righteousness and holiness, that Adam was in before he fell; to be clean and pure, without sin, as he was. Therefore how shall they be able to bear being told that any shall grow up to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, when they cannot bear to hear that any shall come, whilst upon earth, into the same power and Spirit that the prophets and apostles were in? -- though it be a certain truth that none can understand their writings aright without the same Spirit by which they were written.

Now the Lord God opened to me by His invisible power that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ,⁴⁷ and I saw it shine through all; and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation to the Light of life, and became the children of it; but they that hated it, and did not believe in it were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light without the help of any man; neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. For I saw, in that Light and Spirit which was before the Scriptures were given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth, that all, if they would know God or Christ, or the Scriptures aright, must come to that Spirit by which they that gave them forth were led and taught.

On a certain time, as I was walking in the fields, the Lord said unto me, “Thy name is written in the Lamb's book of life, which was before the foundation of the world”: and as the Lord spoke it, I believed, and saw in it the new birth. Some time after the Lord commanded me to go abroad into the world, which was like a briery, thorny wilderness. When I came in the Lord's mighty power with the Word of life into the world, the world swelled and made a noise like the great raging waves of the sea. Priests and professors, magistrates and people, were all like a sea when I came to proclaim the day of the Lord amongst them, and to preach repentance to them.

I was sent to turn people from darkness to the Light, that they might receive Christ Jesus; for to as many as should receive Him in His Light, I saw He would give power to become the sons of God; which power I had obtained by receiving Christ. I was to direct people to the Spirit that gave forth the Scriptures, by which they might be led into all truth, and up to Christ and God, as those had been who gave them forth.

Yet I had no slight esteem of the holy Scriptures. They were very precious to me; for I was in that Spirit by which they were given forth; and what the Lord opened in me I afterwards found was agreeable to them. I could speak much of these things, and many volumes might be written upon them; but all would prove too short to set forth the infinite love, wisdom, and power of God, in preparing, fitting, and furnishing me for the service to which He had appointed me; letting me see the depths of Satan on the one hand, and opening to me, on the other hand, the divine mysteries of His own everlasting kingdom.

When the Lord God and His Son Jesus Christ sent me forth into the world to preach His everlasting gospel and kingdom, I was glad that I was commanded to turn people to that inward Light, Spirit, and Grace, by which all might know their salvation and their way to God; even that Divine Spirit which would lead them into all truth, and which I infallibly knew would never deceive any.⁴⁸

But with and by this divine power and Spirit of God, and the Light of Jesus, I was to bring people off from all their own ways, to Christ, the new and living way; and from their churches, which men had made and gathered, to the Church in God, the general assembly written in heaven, of which Christ is the head. And I was to bring them off from the world's teachers, made by men, to learn of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, of whom the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him”; and off from all the world's worships, to know the Spirit of Truth in the inward parts, and to be led thereby; that in it they might worship the Father of spirits, who seeks such to worship Him. And I saw that they that worshipped not in the Spirit of Truth, knew not what they worshipped.

And I was to bring people off from all the world's religions, which are vain, that they might know the pure religion; might visit the fatherless, the widows, and the strangers, and keep themselves from the spots of the world. Then there would not be so many beggars, the sight of whom often grieved my heart, as it denoted so much hard-heartedness amongst them that professed the name of Christ.

I was to bring them off from all the world's fellowships, and prayings, and singings, which stood in forms without power; that their fellowship might be in the Holy Ghost, and in the Eternal Spirit of God; that they might pray in the Holy Ghost, and sing in the Spirit and with the grace that comes by Jesus; making melody in their hearts to the Lord, who hath sent His beloved Son to be their Saviour, and hath caused His heavenly sun to shine upon all the world, and His heavenly rain to fall upon the just and the unjust, as His outward rain doth fall, and His outward sun doth shine on all.

I was to bring people off from Jewish ceremonies, and from heathenish fables,⁴⁹ and from men's inventions and worldly doctrines, by which they blew the people about this way and the other, from sect to sect; and from all their beggarly rudiments, with their schools and colleges for making ministers of Christ, -- who are indeed ministers of their own making, but not of Christ's; and from all their images, and crosses, and sprinkling of infants, with all their holy-days (so called), and all their vain traditions, which they had instituted since the Apostles' days, against all of which the Lord's power was set: in the dread and authority of which power I was moved to declare against them all, and against all that preached and not freely, as being such as had not received freely from Christ.

Moreover, when the Lord sent me forth into the world, He forbade me to put off my hat to any, high or low; and I was required to Thee and Thou all men and women, without any respect to rich or poor, great or small.⁵⁰ And as I travelled up and down I was not to bid people Good morrow, or Good evening; neither might I bow or scrape with my leg to any one; and this made the sects and professions to rage. But the Lord's power carried me over all to His glory, and many came to be turned to God in a little time; for the heavenly day of the Lord sprung from on high, and broke forth apace, by the light of which many came to see where they were.

Oh, the blows, punchings, beatings, and imprisonments that we underwent for not putting off our hats to men! Some had their hats violently plucked off and thrown away, so that they quite lost them. The bad language and evil usage we received on this account are hard to be expressed, besides the danger we were sometimes in of losing our lives for this matter; and that by the great professors of Christianity, who thereby discovered they were not true believers.

And though it was but a small thing in the eye of man, yet a wonderful confusion it brought among all professors and priests; but, blessed be the Lord, many came to see the vanity of that custom of putting off the hat to men, and felt the weight of Truth's testimony⁵¹ against it.

About this time I was sorely exercised in going to their courts to cry for justice, in speaking and writing to judges and justices to do justly; in warning such as kept public houses for entertainment that they should not let people have more drink than would do them good; in testifying against wakes, feasts, May-games, sports, plays, and shows, which trained up people to vanity and looseness, and led them from the fear of God; and the days set forth for holidays were usually the times wherein they most dishonoured God by these things.

In fairs, also, and in markets, I was made to declare against their deceitful merchandise, cheating, and cozening; warning all to deal justly, to speak the truth, to let their yea be yea, and their nay be nay, and to do unto others as they would have others do unto them; forewarning them of the great and terrible day of the Lord, which would come upon them all.

I was moved, also, to cry against all sorts of music, and against the mountebanks playing tricks on their stages; for they burthened the pure life, and stirred up people's minds to vanity. I was much exercised, too, with school-masters and school-mistresses, warning them to teach children sobriety in the fear of the Lord, that they might not be nursed and trained up in lightness, vanity, and wantonness. I was made to warn masters and mistresses, fathers and mothers in private families, to take care that their children and servants might be trained up in the fear of the Lord, and that themselves should be therein examples and patterns of sobriety and virtue to them.

The earthly spirit of the priests wounded my life; and when I heard the bell toll to call people together to the steeple-house, it struck at my life; for it was just like a market-bell, to gather people together, that the priest might set forth his ware for sale. Oh, the vast sums of money that are gotten by the trade they make of selling the Scriptures, and by their preaching, from the highest bishop to the lowest priest! What one trade else in the world is comparable to it? notwithstanding the Scriptures were given forth freely, and Christ commanded His ministers to preach freely, and the prophets and apostles denounced judgment against all covetous hirelings and diviners for money.

But in this free Spirit of the Lord Jesus was I sent forth to declare the Word of life and reconciliation freely, that all might come to Christ, who gives freely, and who renews up into the image of God, which man and woman were in before they fell, that they might sit down in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Notes and Links

³⁴ In the year 1648.

³⁵ William Penn gives the following testimony to Fox's power in prayer:

“But above all he excelled in prayer. The inwardness and weight of his spirit, the reverence and solemnity of his address and behaviour, and the fewness and fulness of his words, have often struck, even strangers, with admiration, as they used to reach others with consolation. The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his in prayer. And truly it was a testimony he knew and lived nearer to the Lord than other men.” -- Preface to George Fox's “Journal.”

³⁶ This is a characteristic illustration of the way Fox passed beyond theories and doctrines, and demanded practical *life-results*.

³⁷ That is, members of the English or Episcopal Church.

³⁸ The Friends from the time of Fox until the present have been careful to use the word “church” only for the community of spiritual believers. The cathedrals and churches were called “steeple-houses,” and their own places of worship were called “meeting-houses.”

³⁹ A beautiful valley southwest of Nottingham, near the edge of the counties of Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, just west of Bardon Hills.

⁴⁰ See Whittier's poem, “Revelation.”

⁴¹ He means experience.

⁴² There is no account of the origin of this meeting, which seems to have been in existence before Fox came to Eton. There seems to have been considerable definite work done which is not detailed in the "Journal." See "Epistles," Vol. I., page 2, "Truth sprang up (to us as to be a people of the Lord) in Derbyshire in 1647." Eton is in Derbyshire.

⁴³ This is an interesting illustration of Fox's sensitiveness to wrong social conditions and of the practical character of his religion.

⁴⁴ This passage which records a striking personal experience is undated. It is strangely like an experience of the great German mystic, Jacob Boehme, whose works were published in England about the time Fox was beginning his missionary labors. He, too, had all nature opened to him, so that he says he saw the true significance and essence of things. See Jacob Boehme, "Signatura Rerum," which was published in English in 1649. Muggleton, in his "Looking Glass for G. Fox" (second edition, 1756, page 10), says that the writings of Boehme are the "chief books" bought by the followers of Fox.

⁴⁵ The name "Friends" is apparently used as formerly in Chapter I to designate the gatherings of persons who sympathized with Fox's message and who *afterwards* were called "Friends."

⁴⁶ One could wish that this important account of Fox's practical mission to the world were more clearly expressed than is here done in his phraseology, which needs translation into modern terms. There is, he means to say, a universal Divine principle or law of life which finds expression or voice in every soul. "That of God" in the individual "answers" or corresponds with the universal Divine principle. But, unfortunately, this Divine Light within is disobeyed, and thus men are astray -- out of their true life and function. Fox's mission is to call all such to obedience to "that of God" within them.

⁴⁷ This is the central teaching of George Fox. Everything else comes out of this elemental truth. It is, as he says, clearly enough taught in the Scriptures but he now saw the truth as an immediate revelation -- as a primary fact of experience.

⁴⁸ The soul's own assurance of salvation was well proclaimed by Luther, but the high and joyous experience was well-nigh lost in Calvinistic England. Fox reaffirms the privilege of this experience. He proclaims no man's infallibility, but rather the infallibility of the Spirit, in union with which a man may know that he pleases God.

⁴⁹ By a clear spiritual insight Fox saw how large a contribution both Judaism and Paganism had made to the historic church. He went to work to carry the reformation to its logical conclusion. To re-instate primitive Christianity was his aim.

⁵⁰ The real principles here involved were simplicity of life, equal respect for *all* men alike, and strict sincerity. It must be confessed that these principles have sometimes been lost sight of, and dress and language have sometimes become a form to those who opposed all forms.

⁵¹ That is, the testimony of the Spirit.