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A Quaker's visit to Hartford in the year
1676.

Frank De Wette Andrews

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A
QUAKER'S VISIT
TO
HARTFORD
IN THE YEAR
1676

Edited by
FRANK D. ANDREWS

Privately printed
VINELAND NEW JERSEY
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P R E F A C E .

The spirit which influenced the Quakers in the days of George Fox exists and influences men today; this indwelling spirit of God in man is coexistent with him though long in finding expression, it has, however, appeared in the deeply religious of all beliefs and sects since the earth was peopled.

Old as it is, it is a new revelation to many; the still small voice speaking to the soul is seldom heeded, though if followed, would lead to a higher and better life.

The Quaker recognized this voice as of God, a sure guide to the truth. Having the truth he could do no less than share it with others, and the leaders entered upon the work of enlightenment gladly, freely, going about sowing the seeds of righteousness.

The forms and ceremonies of the Church were to him unnecessary and of little value, a paid ministry and costly temples of worship were denounced.

The Quaker found the kingdom of heaven within, and as God created all things, so every thing was sacred, all days, holy days; life in short, must be spiritualized, so attuned to the Divine Life, that the voice of God in the soul would clearly reveal the way and the truth.

This spiritualized life, the union of man with his Creator, gave strength to endure the trials of the world and brought peace through the certainty of a conscious immortality.

William Edmundson who visited Hartford so long ago, was a fine example of the early Quakers who spent their lives in the service of the Lord. While his opinions and beliefs may not coincide with our own, we cannot fail to respect and honor his many sterling qualities, as shown by his life of devotion to the cause; his faithfulness, courage, love of truth and fidelity to duty.

The influence of such a man does not cease with his death, and who can say his teachings on that Sabbath-day in Hartford, when he "set all the Town a Talking of Religion" were without result; that the seed then sown, nurtured through the centuries, finding expression in the lives of men and women of the present day, has not in some degree changed the narrow belief held by their ancestors to a more rational view concerning God and man's relation to Him.

The reader will find William Edmundson's Journal, giving an account of his life and travels, published after his death, of great interest, particularly his experience in America, should they care to learn more regarding him.

FRANK D. ANDREWS.

VINELAND, N. J.

FEBRUARY 4, 1914.

THE QUAKER.

William Edmundson, whose visit to Hartford is here recorded, was born in the north of England, in the year 1627. He was bound apprentice to the trade of carpenter and joiner in York, where he lived several years; afterwards he served in the army, part of the time under Oliver Cromwell. His conscience, always tender, was favorably influenced towards the doctrines of the Quakers and he soon became a convert. For awhile he engaged in trade, but becoming more and more convinced of the truths held by Quakers and meeting George Fox, he carried his message to the people, speaking in public places and making many converts, though persecuted and imprisoned. In 1671, in company with George Fox and others, he went to the West Indies and later to America, visiting several of the Colonies. At Newport, in Rhode Island, he with others accepted a challenge to dispute with Roger Williams. Soon after Edmundson sailed from Boston on his return voyage.

It was on his second visit to New England that he came to Hartford. His life was devoted to the service of truth, and in that service he helped humanity.

He departed this life after about one months sickness, "in sweet Peace with the Lord, in Unity with his Brethren, and Good-Will to all Men," on June 31, 1712, in the eighty-fifth year of his age.

From his reference to the "Baptist Rogers," who stopped at the Inn where he lodged, the time of his visit is known to be late in the month of October, the General Court in session October 21, 1676, granting Elizabeth, daughter of Mathew Griswold of Lyme, and wife of John Rogers, a divorce.

A
QUAKER'S
VISIT TO HARTFORD
1676.

An event of more than passing interest in the early annals of Hartford occurred late in the year 1676, when a Quaker preacher, on his travels through New England, journeyed through the wilderness to the principal town in Connecticut Colony, where on the Sabbath, he delivered his message in both of the churches, and to the people assembled at the Inn where he tarried; suffered arrest, was released, and permitted to resume his journey, having followed the dictates of his conscience in the performance of what he considered his duty.

Hartford at that time was about forty years old; many of the first settlers, who had crossed the sea, and those who with their pastor, Rev. Thomas Hooker, made their way through the trackless forests of Massachusetts Colony to the banks of the Connecticut, had been laid at rest, Thomas Hooker and his successor Samuel Stone, among them. Of those who by reason of strength survived, but few remained well advanced in years, who with the descendants of the early settlers and later additions formed a community of upward of a thousand souls.

These men and women were in the manner of the time profoundly religious, yet could not dwell together in unity of spirit, having differences of opinion which led to controversy, resulting at last in the withdrawal of the minority and the organization of a second society.

The Meeting-House of the First Society was on the east side of "Meeting-House Square" near the road to the river and ferry. It was a square building with a roof rising from its sides in the form of a pyramid. The Church was under the pastoral charge of Rev. Joseph Haynes. In the Square were also the whipping-post, stocks, pillory and the jail for the more hardened offenders.

The burial place of the first settlers, north of the Square had been superseded, and burials were now made in a larger plot on the main street, where lay the bodies of Hooker, Stone and others.

The second house of worship, probably resembled the first, it had recently been erected on the east side of the highway or main street, a few rods south of Little River. Not to be dependent upon their brethren from whom they had separated, they also it is believed, were provided with a bell to call their members together. Rev. John Whiting was the minister.

By the stream some sixty rods distant, and in full view of the Meeting-House was a ship yard, to the south stood the Wyllys mansion; while close by was the old oak in which a few years later the Charter of the Colony was concealed. On the north bank of Little River the dwelling house of the lamented Hooker could be seen. With forty years of growth Hartford had replaced its first rude habitations with more substantial structures, and framed houses of one and two stories were making their appearance along its highways.

Between the meeting houses, and on the same side of the street, was the Ordinary or Inn, kept at that time by Jeremy Adams.

For some time the Colony and all New England

had been devastated by the ravages of the Indians; expeditions had been fitted out and sent against them with more or less success in subduing and dispersing them, until at last their acknowledged leader, King Philip, and many of his warriors were surrounded and destroyed. Scattered bands of Indians remained to prey upon the settlers and the precaution of keeping armed men on guard during divine service, to prevent surprise, still prevailed.

The disciple of George Fox who spent the Sabbath in this town on the Connecticut River, and who in his journal, left an account of the reception he received there, was William Edmundson, an Englishman, then about forty-nine years of age.

After visiting Boston and several of the eastern towns he returned to Newport, in Rhode Island, where, after ministering to the sick who fell victims to the pestilence which followed the victory over the Indians, he too, was overcome by the disease.

On his recovery he decided to go to New York, and with a fellow worker in the cause took passage for that place, he had however heard of the settlement of his countrymen on the Connecticut River and felt impelled to carry his message to them.

He relates in quaint phraseology his experience in the town settled by Hooker and his followers.

He says:—“Now whilst’ we were on Board the Sloop, came much upon me to go to New Hertford, a Chief Town in Connecticut Colony, which lay about Fifty Miles in the Country, through a great Wilderness, and very dangerous to travel, the Indians being in Arms, haunting those Parts, and killing many Christians: so it look’d frightful, that I, who was a Stranger in the Country, should undertake such a Journey in those perilous Times: but the service came close upon me, and I was under great Exercise of Mind about it, yet said nothing of it to

any Man for some Days.

We were sore toss'd at Sea, forward and backward, by contrary Winds and bad weather, yet got once on shore in Shelter-Island, and went to Nathaniel Sylvester's, a Friend, who dwelt there, where we had a Meeting; after which the Wind and Weather seeming to favor us, we went on board again, and set on our Voyage, but in the Night it was exceeding stormy. and we were in great Danger of being cast away; yet by the Lord's Providence escaped, but were driven back to New London: and the Wind continuing against us we stayed there three Days, and endeavoured to get a Meeting, but the people being rigid Presbyterians, would not suffer us to have one."

Hearing of some Baptists, five miles from New London, "who kept the Seventh Day of the week as a Sabbath," they visited and discoursed with them. On the following day, the first of the week, they attempted to hold a meeting in New London, "but the Constable and other Officers came with arm'd Men, and forcibly broke up our Meeting, halting and abusing us very much; but the sober People were offended at them."

"That Evening we weigh'd Anchor, and set sail, the Wind seemed something fair for us; but it still remain'd with me to go to New Hertford, yet it seem'd hard to give up, to be expos'd to such Perils as seem'd to attend that Journey; but I kept it secret, thinking that the Lord might take it off me. We had sailed but about three Leagues when the Wind came strong ahead of us; that Night we had a Storm, and were glad to get a Harbour, where we lay some Days, the Wind blowing stiff against us. And the Hand of the Lord came heavy upon me, pressing me to go to New Hertford; so I gave up to the Will of God, whether to live or die. Then I told the Company, That I was the Cause, why they were so cross'd and detained in their Voyage. And I shew'd them, How the Lord had required me to go to New

Hertford, and the Journey seeming perilous, I had delayed; but now must go, in Submission to the Will of God, whether I lived or died. The Owner of the Sloop wept, and the rest were amaz'd and tender.

Then James Fletcher would go with me: so we went on Shore, and bought each of us a Horse, and the next Morning took leave of our Sloop-Company; then went on our Journey without any Guide, except the Lord, and travel'd thro' a great Wilderness, which held us most of that Day's Journey. We travel'd hard, and by the Lord's gracious Assistance got that Night within four Miles of New-Hertford, where we lodg'd at an Ordinary, and the People were civil. I got up next Morning very early, it being the First Day of the Week, and went to Hertford on foot, leaving my Horse at the Ordinary, and desir'd James Fletcher to stay there, till he saw the Issue of my Service, for I expected at least a Prison at Hertford.

So getting there pretty soon in the Morning, the Town was about two Miles long; and I was mov'd to go to their Worship. I came to one great Meeting-House, but the Priest and People were not come to their Worship, it being early; and my Spirit was shut up from that Place. Then I was brought under great Exercise of Mind, fearing That the Lord was angry with me, and rejected my Service, for my Delay under this Exercise. I went on forward about Half a Mile, so came near to another great Meeting-House, and I found Openness in my Spirit to go thither, I was glad of the Lord's Countenance, tho' the People were not come yet to their Worship.

There was a brave River, where they built many Ships, about a Quarter of a Mile distant; thither I went, and sate down, until I saw People go to their Worship: when they were gather'd I went there, and stood in the Worship-House, near the Priest, until he had done his Service, then I spoke what the Lord gave me: They were moderate and quiet, and the Priest and Magistrates went away, but many of the

People staid, and I had good Service among them: when I had clear'd my Conscience we parted, and I went again towards the River-side, As I was going a Man call'd me to come to his House and dine with him: I stood a little and look'd at him, his Spirit seem'd to be deceitful, I ask'd him, If he would take Money for his Victuals? he said, No; then I told him, I would not eat with him. So I went to the River-side again, and sate down, though I had not eaten any thing that Day.

After some time the Bells rung for their Afternoon Worship, and I was moved to go to the other Worship-House afore mention'd, from which in the Morning my Spirit was shut up. So I went there, and the Priest and People were gather'd, having a Guard of Firelocks, for fear of the Indians coming upon them; whilst at their Worship I went in, and sounded an Alarm in the Dread of the Lord's Power, and they were startled, yet were kept down by the Lord's Power, in which I declared the way of Salvation unto them a pretty while; but after some time, by the Perswasions of the Priest, the Officers haled me out of the Worship-House, and hurt my Arm so that it bled; then they took me to the Guard of Firelocks upon a Hill.

And though it was a piercing cold Day, and I still Fasting, my Body also thin, by reason of the Sickness I had in Rhode-Island not long before, and other Exercises which I travelled thro', yet the Lord's Power supported me, so that the Officer, who had me in Charge, first complained of the Sharpness of the Weather, and ask'd me How I could endure the Cold, for he was very cold? I told him, It was the Entertainment, that their great Professors of Religion in New-England afforded a Stranger, and yet profess'd the Scriptures to be their Rule, which commanded to entertain Strangers, and besides they had drawn my blood; So I shew'd him my Arm that was hurt; he seemed to be troubled, and excused their Magistrates, I told him, The Magistrates and Priests must answer for it to the Lord, for they were the cause of it: then he took me to an Inn, and

presently the Room was fill'd with Professors: much Discourse we had, and the Lord strengthened me, and by his Spirit brought many Scriptures to my Remembrance; so that Truth's Testimony was over them. As one Company went away another came

When they were foil'd, a Preacher amongst the Baptists took up the Argument against Truth, charging Friends with holding a great Error, [which was] That every Man had a Measure of the Spirit of Christ; and would know, If I held the same error? I told him, That was no Error, for the Scriptures witnessed to it plentifully. He said, He denied, that the World had received a Measure of the Spirit, but Believers had received it. I told him that the Apostle said, A manifestation of the Spirit was given to every one to profit withal. He said, That was meant to every one of the believers. I told him, Christ had enlightend every one that came into the World, with the Light of his Spirit: He said, That was every one of the Believers that came into the World: and as I brought him Scriptures, he still applied them to the Believers, saying, There was the Ground of our Error, in applying that to every Man which properly belonged to Believers. Then the Lord by his good Spirit brought to my Mind the Promise of our Saviour, [when he told his Disciples of his going away] That he would send the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, that should convince the World of Sin, and should guide his Disciples into all Truth: Thus the same Spirit of Truth, that leads Believers into all Truth, convinces the World of Sin. So thou must grant, that all have recieved it, or else shew from the Scriptures a Select Number of Believers; and besides them a World of Believers that hath the Spirit, also another World of Unbelievers, that hath no Measure of the Spirit to convince them of Sin. Here the Lord's Testimony came over him, so that he was stop'd, and many sober Professors, who staid to see the End, acquisc'd therewith, and said, indeed, Mr. Rogers, the Man is in the right, for you must find a Select Number of Believers, besides a

World that hath a Measure of the Spirit, that convinces them of Sin, and a World that hath not the Spirit, so not convinc'd of Sin: this you must do, or grant the Argument. He was silent, and the People generally satisfied in that matter, their Understandings being open'd; so they took their leave of me very lovingly, it being late in the Night.

When they were gone, I desired the Woman of the House to boil me a little Milk, for that Day I had not eaten. The Baptist Rogers (aforesaid) lodg'd there that Night, but liv'd Fifty Miles off, and was Pastor to those Seven-Day-Sabbath People, that I had been with above a Week before near New London. The People of this House where we lodged being Presbyterians, I call'd the Baptist from them into another room: he told me where he liv'd, and what People he was Pastor to. I told him, I was with his Hearers, and they were loving and tender. He also acquainted me, he was summon'd to Hertford, to appear before the Assembly that then sate, who had taken away his Wife from him, whom he had married some Years ago, before he was of the Perswasion that he now was of. And since he became a Baptist, her Father, being an Elder of the Presbyterians, was set violently against him, and endeavoured to divorce his Daughter from him, [though he had two Children by her] for some ill Fact he had committed before he was her Husband, and whilst he was one of their Church; whereof, under Sorrow and Trouble of Mind, he had acquainted her, and she had divulged the same to her Father; for which, he said, they had taken away his Wife. I ask'd, How he could join with them in opposing me; and at such a time when I was but One, being a stranger, and they Abundant in Opposition? Also, Whether it was not unmanly to do so? But it being late, I desir'd some further Discourse with him in the Morning, which he assented to; but although I was up before the Sun rose, he had gone away before.

I sent to the Officer, that had the Charge of me

the Day before, to know, if he had any further to do with me, who said, I might go when and where I pleas'd. So I paid the people for my Nights Lodging, and being clear of the Service there, I went towards the Place where I left James Fletcher and our Horses; in the mean time James Fletcher came another way to look for me: thus we miss'd of one another. When he came to Hertford, he heard by several where I was gone, and so came back, and told me, That I had set all the Town a Talking of Religion."

The next morning the Quaker and his companion started on their return, crossing to Long Island, where they held meetings; from there to Shrewsbury and Middletown, in East Jersey, thence across to Pennsylvania, having a meeting at Upland; afterwards taking boat about thirty miles to Salem, in West Jersey, recently settled by John Fenwick and his colony of Quakers. "We order'd our horses to meet us at Delaware Town by Land; so we got Friends together at Salem, and had a Meeting: after which we had the Hearing of several Differences, and endeavour'd to make Peace among them."

William Edmundson was probable the first of the travelling Quaker preachers to visit that part of West Jersey, afterwards frequently mentioned, with Greenwich, Cape May and other localities, in the journals of visiting Friends.

Leaving Salem, Edmundson crossed to Delaware Town, passing through the colony to Maryland, then into Virginia and Carolina; holding meetings, enduring hardships, and having many adventures, before he could conscientiously return to his native land.

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