



George Fox / An Autobiography by George Fox

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"It (George Fox's Journal) is one of the most extraordinary and instructive narratives in the world; which no reader of competent judgment can peruse without revering the virtue of the writer."

—Sir James Mackintosh.

"The basis of his [George Fox's] teaching was the belief that each soul is in religious matters answerable not to its fellows, but to God alone, without priestly mediation, because the Holy Spirit is immediately present in every soul and is thus a direct cause of illumination. From this central belief flowed two important practical consequences, both essentially modern; one was complete toleration, the other was complete equality of human beings before the law."

—John Fiske.

PREFACE.

The Journal of George Fox is one of the great religious autobiographies, and has its place with the "Confessions" of St. Augustine, Saint Teresa's "Life," Bunyan's "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," the "Life of Madam Guyon, Written by Herself," and John Wesley's "Journal." The great interest which has developed in recent years in the Psychology of Religion, and in the study of mysticism, has most naturally given new interest and prominence to all autobiographical writings which lay bare the inward states and processes of the seeking, or the triumphant soul. Professor William James has stated a well-known fact when he says that religion must be studied in those individuals in whom it is manifested to an extra-normal degree. In other words, we must go to those individuals who have a genius for religion—for whom religion has constituted well nigh the whole of life. George Fox is eminently a character of this sort, as nearly every recent student of personal religion has recognized.

Then, again, his Journal is one of the best sources in existence for the historical study of the inner life of the Commonwealth and Restoration periods. There were few hamlets so obscure, few villages so remote that they did not have their streets traversed by this strange man in leather who always travelled with his eyes open. He knew all the sects and shades of religion which flourished in these prolific times. He never rides far without having some experience which shows the spirit and tendencies of the epoch. He never writes for effect, and he would have failed if he had tried, but he has, though utterly unconscious of it himself, filled his pages with the homely stuff out of which the common life of his England was made.

The world-events which moved rapidly across the stage during the crowded years of his activity receive but scant description from his pen. They are never told for themselves. They come in as by-products of a narrative, whose main purpose is the story of personal inward experience. The camera is set for a definite object, but it catches the whole background with it. So here we have the picture of a sensitive soul, bent singly and solely on following a Divine Voice, yet its tasks are done, not in a desert, but in the setting of great historic events. Here are the soldiers of Marston Moor and Dunbar; Cromwell and his household; Desborough and Monk; the quartering of regicides and the "new era" under the second Charles. At every point we have vivid scenes in courts, in prisons, in churches, and in inns. People of all classes and sorts talk in their natural tongue in these pages. Fox has little dramatic power, but everything which furthers, or hinders his earthly mission interests him and gets caught in his narrative. Pepys and Evelyn have readier pens, but Fox had many points of contact with the England of those days which they lacked.

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