

**QUAKERISM, PAST AND
PRESENT: BEING AN INQUIRY
INTO
THE CAUSES OF ITS DECLINE
IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

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Quakerism, Past and Present: Being an Inquiry into the Causes of Its Decline in Great Britain and Ireland by John Stephenson Rowntree

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JOHN STEPHENSON ROWNTREE

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BY

JOHN STEPHENSON ROWNTREE.

" If it be true that spiritual religion too dimly shines within our borders ; if it be true that, in many places, the strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed ; if it becomes a Christian Church not only to acknowledge and deplore the facts, but seriously and in the fear of the Lord to endeavour to ascertain the cause, and to seek for ability to apply the remedy."

YORK QUARTERLY MEETING OF FRIENDS, 1858.

LONDON :

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P R E F A C E.

A FEW sentences only are needful to explain the origin of the accompanying Essay. In the month of March, 1858, there appeared in the public prints the following announcement:—

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.—PRIZE ESSAY.

A GENTLEMAN who laments that, notwithstanding the population of the United Kingdom has more than doubled itself in the last fifty years, the Society of Friends is less in number than at the beginning of the century; and who believes that the Society at one time bore a powerful witness to the world concerning some of the errors to which it is most prone, and some of the truths which are the most necessary to it; and that this witness has been gradually becoming more and more feeble, is anxious to obtain light respecting the causes of this change. He offers a PRIZE of ONE HUNDRED GUINEAS for the best ESSAY that shall be written on the subject, and a PRIZE of FIFTY GUINEAS for the one next in merit. He has asked three gentlemen, not members of the Society of Friends, to pronounce judgment on the Essays which shall be sent to them. They have all some acquaintance with the history of the Society, and some interest in its existing members; and as they are likely to regard the subject from different points of view, he trusts that their decision will be impartial; that they will not expect to find their own opinions represented in the Essays; and that they will choose the one which exhibits most thought and Christian earnestness, whether it is favour-

able or unfavourable to the Society, whether it refers the diminution of its influence to degeneracy, to something wrong in the original constitution of the body, to the rules which it has adopted for its government, or to any extraneous cause.

Rev. F. D. MAURICE, Chaplain of Lincoln's Inn; Professor J. P. NICHOL, Glasgow; and Rev. E. S. PRYCE, Gravesend, have agreed to act as Adjudicators.

The number and ability of the Essays which this announcement elicited, while it afforded gratifying testimony to the interest which the subject has excited, added greatly to the labour and responsibility of the adjudicators. The illness of Professor Nichol, which has since terminated in his lamented death, was one of the "unforeseen hindrances" which occasioned the delay of the adjudicators' decision. It was given in August, 1859, in the following terms:—

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.—PRIZE ESSAYS.

The adjudicators of the Prizes for the best Essays on the Causes of the Decline in the Society of Friends regret that they have been prevented from arriving at an earlier decision by unforeseen hindrances, by the large number and extent of the Essays submitted to them, and by their exceeding desire to deal justly. The terms of the original proposal do not permit the adjudicators to specify more than the two Essays which appear to them to have the superior claims; but they feel it right to bear testimony to the great ability displayed by many of the other writers, and to record their conviction, that the publication of what they have written, by the individual authors, would, in many cases, be advisable, and for the public advantage: In performing the painful duty of setting aside so many estimable and elaborate productions, the adjudicators have necessarily been influenced by various classes of considerations: they have been deterred, in some cases, by the

presence of irrelevant disquisitions, and they have been especially solicitous that the spirit manifested by the successful candidates be such as seemed most in accordance with the object for which the prizes were offered, as plainly set forth in the general advertisement. It has, after careful consideration, been determined that an Essay, bearing a motto from a report of the York Quarterly Meeting of the year 1855, should receive the first prize; and one bearing the motto *verbum, vita, lux*, the second prize. A degree of hesitation having been expressed by the adjudicators as to the relative place which ought to be assigned to the two successful essays, the donor of the prizes has generously offered to make the second prize equal to the first. The writers of these Essays evidently belong to different schools, and contemplate the subject from entirely different points of view. No one of the adjudicators wishes to be held responsible for the sentiments of either writer. But they are unanimous in hoping that, in choosing both, they are doing their best to promote the objects of the giver of the prizes, and to fulfil their trust.

J. P. NICHOL.
F. D. MAURICK.
E. S. PRYCE.

The Essay to which the first prize was adjudged is printed in the present volume.

It may be convenient to state briefly at the outset the line of argument that has been pursued in the following pages. The reader will find his attention first directed to the historical and social features of the epoch in which the Society of Friends arose, these having powerfully influenced the conduct of its founders. The author next examines the doctrines and practices of the "early Friends," with especial refer-

ence to such of them as appear to have occasioned or accelerated the Society's decline. He then endeavours to ascertain the numbers of the Friends at different periods of their history, and determine the extent of their recent diminution. The succeeding chapter (the fifth) is occupied with the second epoch of the Society's history, extending from the death of George Fox, in 1690, to the revival of the discipline in 1760. The sixth and seventh chapters examine the causes of decline which have most prominently manifested themselves within the last hundred years; and the essay is concluded by a summary of the previous argument, and a *résumé* of the whole case presented in a condensed form.