

The Quakers.

THE Quakers, or as they call themselves, 'the Society of Friends,' were the second religious body that separated from the Church in the seventeenth century. Though they, like the Baptists, seceded upon the question of internal discipline, they differed from them in that they were opposed to all outward forms of religion whatever.

The aim of the Quakers was above all things to be spiritual. Their desire was to bring out 'the entire spirituality of the Gospel dispensation.' 'The Inward Light,' the 'Indwelling Word' were the keynotes of their belief. They looked for 'the perceptible influence and guidance of the Spirit of Truth.' So an eminent writer addressing them says, 'It seems to me that you were peculiarly set apart to be advocates of a spiritual religion.'

The founder of Quakerism was George Fox. He was born of humble parentage in the year 1624 at Drayton, in Leicestershire. He spent his early years first as a shepherd-boy, then as an apprentice to a shoemaker. Memorable years, indeed, they were in the history of this country. For the storm was brewing which, in Fox's own lifetime, was to result in the temporary overthrow of Church and Throne. All the strife and bloodshed of civil war was around him—all the bitterness of contending parties. England was torn asunder by controversies, religious and political.

Of this terrible condition of things Fox knew little or nothing. His whole soul was absorbed in the one awful—the one supreme question, 'What am I? What is my place in this world of mysteries?' He was about nineteen years of age when his religious impressions deepened into enthusiasm. He believed himself to be the subject of a special Divine call. He left his home, broke off all intercourse with his friends, and wandered through the country with his Bible as his only companion. Unlike some religious leaders, Fox had lived all his life free from

reproach. And doubtless this fact contributed to the influence he exercised. At eleven years of age he tells us he 'knew pureness and righteousness.' And as a man he never wronged man or woman, for the Lord's power was over him. And people generally loved him for his honesty and innocency.

In his search for light and peace, Fox consulted a few of the Church clergy and some dissenting ministers. But alas! from them he received little or no help. In London, the stronghold of Puritanism, he says, 'all was dark, and under the chain of darkness.' He could find none really spiritual, none who could solve his difficulties.

It was then, in his sense of loneliness and distress, that he first became conscious of the indwelling Light. The Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And henceforth he learned to look within for illumination, for comfort, for strength.

The Bible we have observed was Fox's constant companion. It was, perhaps, the only book with which he was at all intimately acquainted, and he esteemed it as a pearl of great price. Yet the Inward Teacher—the Holy Spirit in the heart—was more than the outward book—the Voice speaking through conscience stronger than the Voice from the inspired writings.

It is impossible not to sympathise with the struggles of this ardent soul trying to realise its union with God: impossible not to share its disappointment at the unreality of the religious world around. Quakerism was a protest against the empty formalism of Churchmen and Puritans alike. Fox appealed to the Church of his day, and he found her absorbed in a political struggle, forgetful of the Divine Presence within her, forgetful of her high Spiritual Mission. He turned to the Puritans, and there was little encouragement to be received from them. Each of their rival factions loudly ap-