

# QUAKER HISTORY

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slowly accepted by the Yearly Meeting as a whole.<sup>23</sup> His description suggests the question why did this meeting thus particularly pioneer. I do not think its location was responsible. It was not another case of the liberalism of the "west." Some of it he attributes to the greater influence of Joseph John Gurney here than elsewhere in the Philadelphia area. It certainly is true that at the time of his visit he was warmly welcomed here, but found opposition at Orange Street, at the Yearly Meeting, and in Germantown.<sup>24</sup> But that cannot have been an enduring reason for the relative liberalism here in later years. Other features of his influence elsewhere in America were not to be found at Twelfth Street. Undoubtedly, individual Friends fostered here through the generations a contagious wider outlook or deeper social conscience. This heritage is one not to be forgotten but to be freely shared.

<sup>23</sup> "Friends for Seventy-five Years," *B.F.H.A.*, XLIX (1960), 3-20. Also reprinted by Friends General Conference.

<sup>24</sup> See *Extracts from the Letters, Journals, etc. of Joseph John Gurney*, printed for the family only, pp. 415-417; not in the published biographies. As early as 1842 Philadelphia Meeting for Sufferings obliquely rebuked their opposite number in London for permitting the circulation of Gurney's doctrinal books or Joseph Sturge's labors for emancipation on his American visit. See T. F. Currier, *Elizabeth Lloyd and the Whittiers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), p. 100.

## ROGER WILLIAMS VS. "THE UPSTARTS:" THE RHODE ISLAND DEBATES OF 1672

By LEON R. CAMP\*

When Lydia Wardell walked stark naked into the church at Newbury during Sunday morning service, the prudent Puritans hurried her out of town. When Deborah Wilson, a "young Woman of a very modest and retired Life, and of a sober Conversation,"<sup>1</sup> also felt divine inspiration to parade through Salem in a similar state of undress, the town elders took her to Court.

Even in 1672, six years after these events occurred, the public behavior of people in the new faith called "Quakers" still disturbed many New Englanders. The incidents mentioned above were so well known that they became a major point of dispute in one of the earliest of New England religious debates.<sup>2</sup> In these debates, held in Newport and Providence, Rhode Island, on August 9, 10, 12, and 17, John Stubbs, John Burnyeat, and William Edmondson (or Edmundson) of the Quaker faith were challenged by the stalwart self-proclaimed "seeker," Roger Williams.

Williams's fourteen points, or "positions," served as the basis of dispute. Argument over the first point, ". . . the people called Quakers are not true Quakers according to the holy Scriptures,"<sup>3</sup>

\*Leon R. Camp is a member of the Department of Speech at Pennsylvania State University.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Besse, *Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers* (London, 1753), II, 236.

<sup>2</sup> The reader should be aware of the differences between the word *debate*, as used in this paper, and the term *disputation*. Disputations were in Latin and required the presence of a moderator. All arguments were proposed and read in syllogistic form. The debates referred to in this article were in English (except for Biblical allusions by the debaters in Latin and Greek), did not have a moderator, and, although the arguments were proposed in syllogistic form, they were not always debated in that manner. Many religious groups held disputations in their churches prior to 1672 in the New England area. It is this writer's belief, however, that the debates referred to in this article may be the first significant religious debate involving open discussion of two major religious groups in New England. For reference on the disputation see William Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Seventeenth-Century Cambridge* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 17. For evidence of Williams's earlier participation in a disputation in 1632, involving William Bradford, John Winthrop, and others, see John Winthrop, *History of New England* (Boston, 1825), I, 41.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Williams, *George Fox Digg'd Out of His Burrowes*, ed. J. Lewis Diman (Providence: Narragansett Club Publications, 1874), V, 66. Subsequent references to this work are cited in the text. It is this writer's belief that the original edition, published by Williams in 1672, a few weeks after the debate, is no longer extant. According to prefatory material, the volume referred to for this article was reprinted from the then available original edition by the Narragansett Club under the editorship of Mr. Diman. The style, punctuation marks, and general appearance of the reprint are similar to Williams's earlier works and writing. In their rejoinder to Williams's debate account (*A New England Fire-Brand*

consumed the first day from nine in the morning until dusk. Williams's first contention in the debate concerned the origin of the name "Quaker."

Although he conceded that the term had been applied in derision, he stated:

... I had cause to judge that the name was given . . . to them from that strange and uncouth possessing of their bodyes, with quaking and shaking . . . even in publick assemblies & Congregation . . . which extraordinary motions I judged to come upon them not from the holy Spirit & Power of God, but from the spirit and power of Satan (p. 41).

Williams then launched into a review of the rise of the "new up-start party," slanting his exposition with numerous general references to the Quakers' "Shakings, Motions, & Extasies." Williams agreed that other "holy men," such as David and Moses, had trembled out of a "holy Awe and Dread of the Majesty of Heaven," but he insisted that the motions of the Quakers lacked true Christian impulse. He concluded by comparing the "Shakings" of the Quakers to those of the neighboring Indians.

Roger's brother, Robert Williams, then asked to speak, but was denied the privilege until he produced a paper asking the Quaker speakers specific questions about the "materiality of the Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 47). After hearing the paper read aloud, the Quakers refused to discuss it. Although constantly heckled by members of the audience who derisively shouted "Old man, Old man," Roger remained undisturbed. The presence of Nicholas Easton, Governor of the colony, and Captain John Cranston, Deputy Governor, did not have a moderating influence on the predominantly Quaker audience. The Separatist and Baptist minority did not speak because of their position and the unwillingness of the Quakers to hear any opposing view except Williams's. When Williams charged the Quaker group with partiality in hearing speakers, a general discussion began in the audience about the "liberty of Speech" (p. 48).

Williams resumed the debate by replying to a minor theological question raised by his antagonists. Were the Scriptures termed the "word of God" in the Bible? Williams cited Hebrews I, Acts XIX, Deuteronomy VIII, and Second Thessalonians to prove they were "implicitly" termed the "word of God." Noticing his op-

*Quenched*) Fox and Burnyeat do not deny the truthfulness of Williams's reporting. In fact, various portions of Williams's writings have been verified by Fox and Burnyeat's book and by Besse's *Collection*.

ponents conferring with one another, Williams asked why such able speakers needed to confer while listening to him. William Edmondson replied, "Your letter exprest an offer to make good the Positions against all comers. . . ." Williams, openly disturbed about the matter, reprimanded them: "God is a God of Order, and doth all things in Number, Weight and Measure, in most admirable Order & Method, so I had thought . . . not I nor any was so simple as to offer to Dispute . . . oppose and answer twenty or thirty or one hundred at once . . . (p. 56).

Edmondson, a noisy spokesman for the Quakers, then interrupted Williams with a charge of blasphemy. Deputy Governor Cranston quickly reproved Edmondson, urged him to be quiet, and asked Williams to continue (p. 58). Williams contended that the Quakers were falsely interpreting the doctrine of "Figures and Signs" by allowing their youth to appear naked in public exhibiting "shaking motions."<sup>4</sup>

Edmondson appeared to be confused by Williams's charges. Williams continued to press his point by referring to George Bishop's *New England Judged*, which supposedly contained an account of two women who were whipped for public nakedness in New England.<sup>5</sup> Burnyeat replied that Quakers abhorred all impurity and uncleanness, and even its appearance; yet if it should ". . . please the Lord God to stir up any of his Daughters so to appear as a Sign and Testimony against the Nakedness of others, they durst not condemn it" (p. 60). Stubbs then took the floor to reiterate Burnyeat's statements by quoting Isaiah, Chapter XX, and by recalling that Isaiah was commanded to go naked as a sign to the Ethiopians and Egyptians, to prophesy and denounce (p. 61).

Williams never denied the truth of Scriptures as quoted by the Quakers. His reply to Burnyeat centered on the practicality of public nakedness. The Calvinist contended that even in Biblical times all except the cannibals covered their "secret parts," and that present-day society demanded that women should be "re-

<sup>4</sup> The Quakers cited Philippians, Chapter II, verse 12b, as scriptural justification for their acts. "Work out Salvation with fear and trembling." George Fox and John Burnyeat, in their reply to Williams, *A New England Fire-Brand Quenched*, published six years after the debate, do not deny their followers went naked as ". . . a Sign of the Nakedness of the Professors of our Age." Fox believed ". . . the Lord in his power moved some of his sons and Daughters to go naked" (pp. 28-29).

<sup>5</sup> Williams failed to cite page references to prove his point. Bishop was a Quaker historian.

tired" in nature. Women should find their place in the home, he concluded. Civil and sober people did not practice public nakedness (p. 62).

His opponents replied they did not accept the practice of public nakedness unless they were commanded by God to do so. Williams then rose and asked how it could be known whether such a command was divinely genuine or pure fantasy. He further questioned: ". . . under cover that *one* might be so commanded and sent of God in such a posture . . . among men, why might not ten or twenty or all the women in [the] assembly be so stirred up . . .?" (p. 62). The Quaker debaters did not answer these statements.

The first day's debate, dominated by namecalling and slander, stopped at dusk. Both sides claimed victory, but except for the discussion on "Figures & Signs," which may have proved beneficial to the theologians present, the most significant event of the day was an eclipse of the sun.

The second day of the contest, Williams was hoarse. Moreover, he had a headache and felt "inclined" to stay in bed. When he arrived at the Quaker meetinghouse, he found his opponents ready and waiting. This time he took a seat closer to the audience in order to be heard. His audience included the governor and deputy governor of the colony plus a number of townspeople. Members of the audience soon noted his sleepiness and circulated a rumor that he was drunk. Although Williams complained of being ill, records do not indicate that he had imbibed (p. 67).

The debate started again on a minor theological point, but became fiery when Williams charged that Fox had been unethical in the use of quotations when writing his book, *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded*. Williams's technique of selecting passages in Fox's book, reading them aloud, and then attempting to disprove them particularly angered his opponents, who were always ready to defend their leader. Quaker denunciation over this point became so furious that Williams resigned himself to a long battle, determined to make his best "of a bare Wind" on the issue (p. 75). Williams's technique of reading passages from Fox's book for refutation aroused such ire that Burnyeat followed the quotations in his own text as Williams read them. His desire to prove Williams either wrong or unethical commanded his time until the end of the day (p. 77).

Still determined and unflinching in the face of attack, Williams

wrote in his account: ". . . I knew what forward children and brutish Spirits I dealt with, and resolved to go softly and to speak softly, [so] I could gain ground by inches at least. . ." (p. 77). Williams then seems to have gained "ground by inches," for he records: "We went on thus in alleading Quotations, though not in a close Examination of them which they endured not . . . I made some sallies out upon them and had some Skirmishings and sometimes sharp Disputes before I would retreat from the Quotation" (p. 80).

At one point in the debate, Williams told his listeners he "was not desirous" of troubling them with more quotations, but they urged him to go on with cries of "more, more." He obediently followed their instructions. He wrote in his journal, "I quoted many more examples to make up an overwhelming cloud of Witnesses against [them]" (p. 80).

About noon, Edmondson interrupted to tell Williams that the audience had been kept too long and that Williams had proved nothing. Immediately after this, Edmondson began a long sermon. Williams rose to speak after Stubbs finished, but Edmondson interrupted him from his chair. After hearing two sermons silently, Williams insisted that reason and civility demanded he should be heard.

When members of the audience asked him how he could reply to two sermons at once, Williams answered that God was rational and had order and "did not prompt men to break hedges and leap over one Ordinance into another" (p. 100). He then asked:

We were engaged in mutual Conference and Disputation . . . how come we then to fall into Popular Orations & Sermons? Is it comely when persons are Disputing to fall upon our knees and answer an Argument with a Prayer (a frequent practice with the Quakers)? Furthermore, is it proper to break off Prayer and fall to disputing, or out of Disputation into Preaching? (p. 100).

After hearing Williams's questions, Edmondson rose and retorted, ". . . why should we sit here and suffer him to vent his Blasphemies and Lies? He hath kept us here two days, and has proved nothing!" (p. 100). Quite disturbed by this outburst, Williams replied that if Christ were present, the Quakers would contend that he hadn't proved anything either! (p. 100).

Debate over minor theological issues consumed time until Stubbs asked Williams why he was not in church Sunday. Was he forgetting the Lord's Ordinances? Williams replied that he

had not attended because his "Soul" could not find "rest" in any of the churches. "In the earlier churches," said Williams, "there was a Time of Purity and Primitive Sincerity—now there is a time of many Flocks pretending to be Christs and saying, Loe, here he is" (p. 102).

The verbosity of the speakers restricted advancement upon the list of points to be debated. After two days of debating from nine in the morning until dusk, it was evident that time restrictions were necessary. Williams publicly asked his opponents what they wished to do about the situation. Edmondson blustered that he had other important business to attend to rather than Williams's "false charges" (p. 104).

Williams decided he had other important business also, and called Edmondson's bluff by leaving the hall. Fifteen minutes later, one of the Quakers sent from the meetinghouse pleaded with him to come back and resume the debate. After returning, the tiresome Edmondson took the floor, pretended self-righteousness, and told Williams they were "willing to hear the utmost" in another meeting the next day at nine. Williams, this time the compromiser, requested that on the following day, each debater be allowed fifteen minutes per point. This the Quakers readily agreed to, and the meeting closed (p. 106).

Williams was very selective in his use of evidence on the third day. The time limit of fifteen minutes per point restricted all of the participants and especially limited Williams. It is reasonable to assume that the time limit forced Williams to use Scripture to prove his points, instead of continuing with Fox's book as source material for refutation.

In contrast to the two previous days' proceedings, things were calm until Edmondson disagreed with Williams's interpretation of Genesis VI. Interrupting the debate, he cried out, "Blasphemy! He speaks Blasphemy!" Deputy Governor Cranston reprimanded him for his "misunderstandings" and told him to sit down. Edmondson then called for a reading of Williams's previous statements from the shorthand reporter.

The debate over this minor point was dropped when the prescribed time ran out, and discussion moved on to the fourth and fifth points. Williams's record fails to reveal the clash over the content of these two contentions. Both sides frequently quoted passages of Scripture as proof. Once when Williams asked his

silent audience to regard his arguments with charity, his opponents replied, "We regard not what thou thinkest and sayest of us, nor do we need thy charity, but go on to thy proofs" (p. 164). Shortly after the debate began on the sixth point, Burnyeat delivered a half-hour sermon on Repentance. Then the debaters discussed the last point briefly and retired for the day.

On the last day, the debate was held at Providence, but no one bothered to record the site. Perhaps it was held in the open air. Williams began the debate by attempting to reintroduce his brother's letter which had been rejected by the Quakers at Newport. Edmondson replied that they hadn't come to hear "papers" but to hear "charges & proof" (p. 217). Immediately, Thomas Olney, a leading Baptist in Providence and member of the audience, asked to have the letter read aloud, but Edmondson retorted, "Who art thou? Art not thou a Baptist? Hath not thou seen it [the letter] already? Thou art an Envious & filthy man" (p. 217). John Stubbs and John Cartwright<sup>6</sup> did not press the issue with Edmondson. John Green, military captain and magistrate from Warwick, asked Edmondson if "Mr. Williams be here as a Delinquent charged to Answer at the Barr, or as a Disputant upon equal terms" (p. 218)? This question the Quakers refused to discuss.

When a "Mr. Caverly" of Warwick asked the debaters to choose a moderator, Edmondson replied that Williams had already provided a judge. He referred to Williams's challenge, which left "all matters . . . to every mans Conscience" (p. 218). Williams did not press the matter, and no official moderator or judge was chosen to preside over the debate. Williams seemed confident of favorable audience opinion in Providence, probably because it was his home town. He wrote in his account, "I knew there would be no great need of a Moderator" (p. 218).

Records of the Providence debate show that Samuel Gorton, an agitator generally in disagreement with Williams, publicly corrected John Stubbs in his Greek translation of Scripture and that a "Joseph Jinks" interrupted the proceedings to side with the Quakers. This particularly disturbed Williams. Jinks apparently was his next-door neighbor, who had traveled to Newport for the earlier portion of the debates. Others in the audience followed Jinks's lead and challenged Williams from their seats (p. 311).

<sup>6</sup> Cartwright replaced Burnyeat, who did not appear with the Quakers in Providence; records indicate that Cartwright was a member of the Quaker speaking group from the beginning.

Some of the audience agreed with Williams, however, as this report shows:

An Aged man, T.A.<sup>7</sup> . . . much of late adhering to the Quakers said, "Methinks there is weight in Mr. Williams and his Argument." He being a noted man and his voice very audible (and so heard by all) W.E. was forced to take notice of his speech, and said, wherein is there any weight in it? T.A. answered, "Why if a Magistrate be immediately inspired by God, and speaks Gods Laws and Sentence, sure there seems to be no need of any other Laws" (p. 313).

During the last part of the debate, Edmondson was interrupted by William Harris, "a Fire-brand of Town, and Colony & Country," who agreed with him. Ready to capitalize on audience approval and another chance to display his oratory, Edmondson launched a new verbal counteroffensive but was reprimanded by the magistrate, Captain Green of Warwick. Williams says even John Stubbs "spoke to W. Edm. to forebear . . ." (p. 320). Pardon Tillinghast, another leader of the Baptists in Providence, then debated against the Quakers while Williams withdrew. The fourteenth "position" was never debated because the participants apparently were too weary. As the Quaker debates had begun, so they ended—quickly and explosively.

It is a gross understatement to say that the Rhode Island debates were poor examples of good debating. Williams, who differed with the Quakers, wished to hold a public debate to air certain theological disagreements. Such a debate could never have been held anywhere else in New England in 1672 without fear of reprisal.

Although many disagreed with the Quakers, no one in Rhode Island ever urged punitive legislation against them for their radical beliefs. Thus the debate marks an important milestone in the application of the free speech principle. Both Williams and his Quaker opponents recognized that the democratic processes of discussion and debate were far more conducive to problem-solving than the rack and the stocks.

<sup>7</sup> T.A. may be Thomas Arnold, who served in the Rhode Island General Assembly from 1665 to 1684. William R. Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence* (Providence, 1843), p. 645.

## DR. JOHN FOTHERGILL AND THE AMERICAN COLONIES

By BETSY COPPING CORNER<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Fothergill's interest in the American colonies had an early start. His father, John Fothergill, Sr., was a Quaker preacher who made three visits to America representing the Society of Friends. The first of these prolonged religious visits started in 1705, the second in 1721, and the third in 1736.<sup>2</sup> The stories he told his children of voyages across the Atlantic, taking ten or twelve weeks, and his horseback rides through the American wilderness to remote Quaker settlements held them spellbound. Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, Pennsylvania, William Penn's City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia, were names that sang themselves into childhood dreams of faraway lands.

Grown to manhood, Dr. Fothergill was never able to tear himself away from his practice long enough to visit America. Instead he opened his hospitable London home to American visitors. He had inherited his father's American friends. These friendships formed in Philadelphia were extended by the next generation of prosperous Quaker merchants, who came to London at regular intervals on business. In 1743, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting named Dr. Fothergill its official correspondent from London Yearly Meeting. He welcomed the opportunity to become, as he put it, "a part of the canal of communication betwixt the two most considerable parts of the Society . . . wherein our very Essence consists."<sup>3</sup> From 1743 until 1780—the year of his death—Dr. Fother-

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Corner is the author of a biography of Dr. William Shippen, Jr. At present she is editing, with a collaborator, the letters of Dr. John Fothergill for publication. This paper, printed by courtesy of The Osler Club of London, was presented at a symposium held at the British Postgraduate School of Medicine, Hammersmith Hospital, 16 October 1962, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Dr. John Fothergill's birth. Certain paragraphs based upon Mrs. Corner's article, "Dr. Fothergill's Friendship with Benjamin Franklin," published in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. CII, no. 5 (October 1958), are included by permission.

<sup>2</sup> *An Account of the Life and Travels in the Ministry of John Fothergill, Sr.* (London, 1753; Philadelphia, 1754).

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Fothergill to Israel Pemberton, 14 May 1743, Pemberton Papers, XXXIV, 4, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.