

THE  
L I G H T

UPON THE

Candlestick.

SERVING FOR

OBSERVATION

Of the principal things in the Book called;

*The Mysteries of the Kingdom of God, &c*  
Against several Professors,

*Treated of, and written by Will. Ames.*

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1 John 1. 5. *This is the Message which we have heard from him, and we declare unto you, That God is LIGHT, and in him is no darkness at all.*

Eph. 5. 13. *For what so ever maketh manifest, is LIGHT.*

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Printed in Low-Dutch for the Author, 1662. and translated into English by B. F.

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LONDON, Printed for Robert Wilson, 1663.

### **THE QUAKER UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP**

...is composed of seekers, mainly, but not exclusively members of the Religious Society of Friends. QUF seeks to promote open dialogue on its issues of interest. It writes in its statement of purpose:

While being convinced of the validity of our own religious paths, we not only accept but rejoice that others find validity in their spiritual traditions, whatever they may be. Each of us must find his or her own path, and each of us can benefit for the search of others.

In the selection of both its speakers and manuscripts, QUF tries to implement those ideas.

An extract from *Spiritual Reformers of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, by Rufus M. Jones, McMillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1914 is used with permission.

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## PREFACE

Universalist ideas are found in abundance in the writings of early Friends. Their rediscovery and dissemination aids modern Friends in their search for a better understanding of their roots.

Winifred Burdick, who shares our interest in Quaker universalism, inspired our search for this tract. A student of sixteenth and seventeenth century religious literature, she remembered it as strong support for the proposition, as expressed by Rufus Jones In his *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, that

Quakerism is no isolated or sporadic religious phenomenon. It is deeply rooted in a far wider movement that had been accumulating volume and power for more than a century before George Fox had become a 'prophet' of it to the English people.

The tract brought to English Quakerism of the 1660's a representative product of the religious ferment in the Low Countries evoked by the religious philosophy of Descartes (1596-1690) and Spinoza (1632-1677), and it used a then well-known Quaker name (William Ames) as the name of its author. Its probable author was Peter Balling, a member of a group of spiritually-minded Dutch intellectuals, known as Collegiants, with whom Spinoza lived from 1660 to 1663. New research by scholars Richard Popkin and Michael Signer shows an even stronger connection with Spinoza. In their book relating the translation of a letter from Margaret Fell to the Jews,<sup>1, 2</sup> Balling's thesis is that inward experience of the Divine is the only authentic path to Truth. It is a path accessible to all persons, and is the standard by which all religious claims, including those of Scripture, are to be judged.

Called *The Light upon the Candlestick*, or *Lucerna super Candelabrum*, the tract was written in 1662. It was translated into English from the original Latin by Benjamin Furley, a Quaker merchant of Colchester then living in Rotterdam. It was adopted as a Quaker tract and circulated as such in England, with a title page, reproduced here, that connected it only vaguely with its author.

William Ames (? -1662), the Quaker “author” whose name appears on the title page of *The Light upon the Candlestick*, had been an English soldier and a Baptist, and had joined Friends in Cork, Ireland in 1655. He was banished from that city in 1657 and spent most of the rest of his life on the Continent. Here, too, he was imprisoned at a critical time for our story. For, after his believed meeting with Spinoza to engage him to translate a letter from Margaret Fell (see Epilogue), he is supposed to have invited the Jewish scholar to join with him at meeting for worship. Unfortunately, according to Popkin, Ames was jailed before the two went and states that he (Popkin) is certain that Spinoza at no time went to a meeting for worship. With far less information than this recent scholarship, Sewel in his *History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People called Quakers* (London, 1722) speculated that Balling may have been influenced by Ames’ preaching, for even at the time of Sewel’s writing it was known that Ames had some contact with the Collegiants. Sewel suggests that

...there have been contact with such as either commended the Quakers, or defended their doctrine, though they themselves never could resolve to join them publicly.

We recreate the tract here in two versions, the 17th-century original for readers who enjoy the ruffles and flourishes of the language of the period, and a gloss by Rufus

Jones for the reader who wishes to get quickly to the heart of the matter. The Jones passage is extracted from his *Spiritual Reformers an the 16th and 17th Centuries* (pp 128-132; 1914, Macmillan). The interested reader will also find in Jones' volume (pp. 123-128) an elucidation of the ideas of Descartes and Spinoza underlying Balling's argument.

The late-twentieth-century reader is left to speculate whether Balling's tract was primarily a product of his Descartes-Spinoza heritage, as Jones believed, or the covert acknowledgement of his conversion by Ames, as Sewel thought. Or, perhaps, as the recent evidence presented by Popkin and Signer indicates, it was a case of mutual irradiation. Whatever the correct hypothesis, it seems clear that early Friends accepted the tract as speaking for them.

This ten-page tract has been surrounded by us with seven pages of explanation, in part to encourage the reader to find the patience to penetrate its 17th-century prose, and in part to share our pleasure in unearthing it and discovering its origins. It is a seminal document in the history of Friends' efforts to peel away centuries of churchly dogma and rediscover the true, and universal, message of Jesus of Nazareth.

We are grateful to the late Miriam Jones Brown, Mary Hoxie Jones and the Quaker Collection at the McGill Library at Haverford College for assisting us in our search for material on this remarkable tract — which we are reproducing here with its original 17th-century spelling.

- Sally Rickerman / Kingdon Swayne

<sup>1</sup> Eds. Richard H. Popkin and Michael A. Signer, *Spinozas Earliest Publication*, Van Gorcum 1978. Wolfeboro NH.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller discussion of this research and the involvement of other Quakers see the Epilogue.

## **Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries**

*by Rufus M. Jones*

*The Light upon the Candlestick*, to which we shall now turn for the ripest ideas of this little sect, was written while Spinoza was living among the Collegiants in Rynsburg. It was very quickly discovered by the Quakers, who immediately recognized it as “bone of their bone,” and circulated it as a Quaker Tract. It was translated into English in 1663 by B. F. (Benjamin Furley, a Quaker merchant of Colchester, then living in Rotterdam), who published it with this curious title page:

The Light upon the Candlestick. Serving for Observation of the Principal things in the Book called, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God, &c. Against several Professors, Treated of, and written by Will Ames*. Printed in Low Dutch for the Author, 1662, and translated into English by B. F.

The Collegiant author, quite in the spirit and style of Spinoza, urges the importance of discovering a central love for “things which are durable and uncorruptible,” “knowing thereby better things than those to which the multitude are link’t so fast with love.” We have outgrown the “toyes with which we played as children,” “there is now “no desire of moving thereunto, because we have found better things for our minds”; so, too, “all those things in men, even to old age, so much delight” would seem like “toyes” if they discovered the true Light “which abides forever unchangeable,” and if through it they got a sight of “those things which are alone worthy to be known.” This “true and lasting change,” from “toyes” to “things which are durable and eternal,” can come only through an inward conversion.

When a new vision begins from within, then the outward action follows of itself, but no man will part with what he judges best till he sees something better, and then the weaker

yields to the stronger without any forcing. This whole work of conversion, of transformation, of “lasting change,” must have its origin in something within ourselves. We cannot turn from the baubles and “toyes” and our “desire for that which is high in the world” until a Light from some source plainly shows us an eternal reality for which we may “highly adventure the tryal.” There is, our author insists, only one place where such a guiding Light could arise, and that is within the soul itself, as an inward and immediate knowledge: “’Tis not far to seek. We direct thee to within thyself. Thou oughtest to turn into, to mind and have regard unto, that which is within thee, to wit, the Light of Truth, the true Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world. Here ’tis that thou must be not without thee, Here thou shalt find a Principle certain and infallible, through which increasing and going on into, thou mayest at length arrive unto a happy condition. Of this thou mayest highly adventure the tryal. And if thou happenest to be one of those that would know all things before thou dost begin. . . know this, Thou dost therein just as those that would learn to read without knowing the Letters. He that will not adventure till he be fully satisfied, shall never begin, much less finish his own salvation. We say then, that we exhort every one turn unto the Light that’s in him.”

In true Cartesian fashion, he demonstrates why this Light must have its locus within the soul and not in some external means or medium. All knowledge that God is being revealed in external signs, or through external means, already presupposes a prior knowledge of God. We can judge no doctrine, no Book to be Divine except by some inward and immediate knowledge of what really is Divine. Without this Light the Scriptures are only Words and Letters. But “if we experience that the Book called the Bible in regard to the Divine doctrine therein comprised hath such a harmony

with That [in us] by which God is known, that He must needs have been the Author of it, there cannot rationally be any more powerful demonstration.”

The same principle is true with regard to every conceivable form of revelation which could be made to our outward senses, whether by words, or by miracles, or by any other visible “operations.” No finite thing can bring us a knowledge of God unless we already have within us a sufficient knowledge of Him to make us able to appreciate and judge the Divine character of the particular revelation; that is to say, we must already have God in order either to seek Him or to find Him; or, as Balling puts it, “Unless the knowledge of God precedes, no man can discern Him.” God is, therefore, the *prius* of all knowledge: “The knowledge of God must first be, before there can be knowledge of any particular things,” and God must be assumed as present in the soul before any basis of truth or of religion can be found. “The Light is the first Principle of Religion; for, seeing there can be no true Religion without the knowledge of God, and no knowledge of God without this Light, Religion must necessarily have this Light for its first Principle.” “Without thyself, O Man,” he concludes, “thou hast no means to look for, by which thou mayest know God. Thou must abide within thyself; to the Light that is in thee thou must turn thee; there thou wilt find it and nowhere else. God is nearest unto thee and to every man. He that goes forth of himself to any creature, thereby to know God, departs from God. God is nearer unto every man than himself, because He penetrates the most inward and intimate parts of man and is the Life of the inmost spirit. Mind, therefore, the Light that is in thee.”

This Light — the first Principle of all Religion — is also called in this little Book by many other names. It is “the living Word,” “the Truth of God,” “the Light of Truth”; it is



“Christ”; it is the “Spirit.” As a Divine Light, it reproves man of sin, shows him that he has strayed from God, accuses him of the evil he commits. It leads man into Truth, “even though he has never heard or read of Scripture”; it shows him the way to God, it gives him peace of conscience in well-doing; and, if followed and obeyed, it brings him into union with God, “wherein all happiness and salvation doth consist.” It operates in all men, though in many men there are serious “impediments” which hinder its operations — “the lets to it are manifold” — but as soon as a man turns to it and cleanses his inner eye — removes the “lets” — he discovers “a firm foundation upon which he may build stable and enduring things: A Principle whereby he may, without ever erring, guide the whole course of his life, how he is to carry himself toward God, his Neighbour and himself.” The writer, having thus delivered his message, wishes to have it distinctly understood that he is not trying to draw his readers to any new sect, or to any outward and visible church. “Go to, then, O Man,” he says, “whoever thou art, we will not draw thee off from one heap of men to carry thee over unto another, ’tis somewhat else we invite thee to! We invite thee to Something which may be a means to attain thy own salvation and well-being” — a membership in the invisible Church.

Such is the teaching of this strange little book, written by the friend of Spinoza, and revealing the maturest expression of this slowly developing spiritual movement, which began with Hans Denck and flowed uninterrupted through many lives and along many channels and burst out full flood in England in “the Children of the Light,” who were known to the world as Quakers.

### **The Light upon the Candlestick**

Things are not for words, but words for things — if therefore we understand things aright and as they ought, by words, it must be by such as are fit to imprint the things themselves in those to whom they should occur, and then it were enough (to make known our thoughts to others as we conceive them) only to make use of such words.

But forasmuch as we find the matter in this case far otherwise, and that two men speaking or writing the same words, may nevertheless have different, yea, sometimes contrary thoughts, the disability of performing this fitly by words or discourse, is clearly

inferred. Nor may we at all wonder at it, seeing we know to what a perpetual change languages are subject, even such that the very words may

*...If words are too gross to express the refined thoughts of mortal men, how much less then can they be in truth said to be the ineffable Word of the eternal God?*

be changed from their pristine signification. And the imperfection is so great, that whosoever should have invented them, such as now they are in use, we should certainly believe that he had little or no knowledge of those things that are thereby intended to be signified. So that if we would better express things unto another by words and speeches, we had need find new words, and consequently a whole new language: But that would be a toyle and labour indeed.

In the mean while we see what a Sea of Confusion flows from hence to all mankind: For although there should be none who sometimes through ignorance, and sometimes by subtilty or wickedness might rest or pervert words contrary to the mind of the speaker or writer, in such a manner as themselves that so do should think best for their own ends, from whence consequently all this deceit, slandering, contention, and the like proceeds: yet so it is, that how

upright or prudent soever a man goes to work in this matter, he nevertheless finds himself liable to mislead, or to be misled.

But although the case be thus with words and discourses at present in use, yet for all that, they are the most ready, and so far as I know, the fittest means to make known all our thoughts unto others by: And for this reason therefore, though so much confusion and deceit happens to arise from hence, that no man that hath but any experience, can be ignorant thereof: yet may we not (therefore) be too much afraid of them neither, as many do manifest themselves to be, who because they have some experience hereof, are apt to believe we are about to deceive them, especially if they be but forewarned thereof.

This, as in many things, so it hath chiefly taken place in that which is commonly esteemed for Religion: In which 'tis so with most men, that they will scarce give audience to, much less take into consideration any thing held forth unto them by any whom they judge not to be of their own opinion, to avoid as they imagine, being thereby deluded.

Yet if they were thus towards their own Party, we might think it was an act of prudence, and that they would see with their own eyes: But no, in no wise, this is too hard a task: whatsoever cometh on that side, is received with such partiality for good and current Coyne, as if there were no danger nor possibility of erring: whereas nevertheless it is all alike with the one as with the other opinion. It all depends but upon a possibility of being nearest to the Truth: and for the upholding every one his own opinion, and defending against others, there's so much ado, so much pains taken, so much Scholastic Learning, study and disputing, that one would rather believe that there were no true Religion at all, then that this should needs be it.

*Fear and Partiality  
 are a snare to most  
 men.*

Seeing then 'tis thus at present, can we much blame the common people, that they despair of ever being able to trim up this hurt, and are glad when they can but find any that are greedy of the Work, upon whom they may cast the whole burthen? Surely no: for he that sees but a little clearly sees, that there's always contention behind, and no end till a man grows weary of it: Nor is the Conquest just his that hath Truth, but that can best handle his Tongue. A miserable thing if it were this to be fought and found! But it is not so with the true Religion.

Go to then, O man, who ever thou art, we will not draw thee off from one heap of men, to carry thee over unto another, 'tis somewhat else we invite thee to. Lend us but a little audience: Surely thou knowest thus much. That as it is an extremity to receive all things without distinction, that present themselves to us, so 'tis no less to reject all things without judgement. We invite thee to something which may be means to attain to thy own salvation and well-being: Be as distrustful, or rather prudent or foresighted as thou wilt,

*'Tis little worth that is not worth the trial: The loss is little, the gain may be invaluable.*

thou canst not in reason  
 refuse us thy ear in this thing:  
 All the damage thou canst  
 possibly have by doing that

which we exhort thee to, is only to have taken a little pain in vain, if that which is promised should not ensue: Whereas on the contrary; should it follow, thou mightest come to the enjoyment of a matter of so great a worth, that would not be exchanged for all that's esteemed great in the earth. Moreover, 'tis not far to seek, but at hand; 'tis nigh thee, yea and in thy self. And there thou *mayest* experience the trial of that which we declare, which is the most certain and sure that can be desired.

We direct thee then to within thyself, that is, that thou oughtest to turn into, to mind and have regard unto that

which is within thee, to wit, *The Light of Truth, the true Light which enlighten every man that cometh into the world.* Here 'tis that thou must be, and not without thee. Here thou shalt find a Principle certain and

*'Tis hard helping him that durst not try.*

infallible, and whereby increasing and going on therein, thou mayest at length arrive unto a happy condition: Of this thou mayest highly adventure the tryal. But if thou durst not do so much, 'tis hard to help thee. And if thou happenest to be one of those that wouldst know all things, before thou dost begin,

yea, even those things which are experienced in a condition to which thou art so much a stranger, that there's nothing in thee hath so much

*Many desire to know all things, but few to experience any thing.*

agreement therewith, as to comprehend it according to truth: Know this, Thou dost (therein) just as those that would learn to Read, without knowing the Letters.

To desire to know all things that we are capable of, is good and laudable: But to go further, is folly. There will be alwayes something else to ask, and our knowledge will ever be too short. He that will not adventure till he be fully satisfied, shall never begin, much less finish it to his own salvation.

But we judge it needful (as much in us lyes) to open unto you that unto which we do exhort you, that people may understand what it properly is.

We say then, That we exhort every one to turn into the *Light*, that's in him (We give it rather the appellation of *Light*, than any thing else, otherwise it's all

*'Tis not the Name, but the Nature, virtue and Substance we stand for.*

one to us whether ye call it, *Christ, the Spirit, the Word, &c.* seeing these all denote but one and the same thing): Yet the word *Light* being in all its natural signification somewhat else then that which we intend thereby, we shall

therefore in brief endeavour clearly to express what we intend under this denomination.

*The Light* (then we say) is a clear and distinct knowledge of truth in the understanding of every man, by which he is so convinced of the Being and Quality of things, that he cannot possibly doubt thereof.

*The LIGHT as to man, what it is, defined.*

From this definition which is here given of the *Light*, 'tis clear, that it must needs comprehend in it the principal effect of showing us, and giving us the knowledge of what's *Truth* and *Falsehood*, what's good and evil: which verily is a matter of so great concernment, that without it men must needs swerve up and down in continual darkness, opinion and sin, neither knowing truth at all, nor doing any good, but gropingly, by haphazard without any certainty.

*This Light then, Christ the Truth, &c. is that which makes manifest and reproves sin in man, shewing him how he has strayed from God, accuseth him of the evil which he doth and hath committed; yea this is it which judgeth and condemmeth him: Again,*

*This is the preaching to every Creature under Heaven, though they have never read or heard of the Scripture. This is it which leads man into truth, into the way to God, which excuseth him in well-doing, giving him peace in his Conscience, yea, brings him into union with God, wherein all happiness and salvation doth consist.*

*The nature and operation of the Light is to make manifest, and to discover.*

Moreover, seeing it is properly the nature of this *Light* infallibly to discover sin and evil, *to reprove and convince thereof: it can never possibly consent thereunto.* And although it be true indeed, That the operations of the *Light* are not in all men alike powerful, in whom it is nevertheless: yea, (though) in some men (it) seems to have no operation at all:

Yet this is occasioned only by those impediments that do hinder it: For as *the natural light* by the interposition of other

*The Sun, though oft darkned as to us, yet is always the same in itself. So the true Light*

bodies or covers, may be hindered from having its operation there where else it would, were those things which impede, removed, the *Light* (it

self) still abiding in its self unchanged: Even so it is also with this *Light* whereof we speak. The lets in this are manifold. All whatsoever we meet in this world, seems to proclaim war in this case. What is there that hath no[t] a powerful operation upon one or other of the Sences of man, through which passing over into the soul, the memory is so filled, that nothing else can enter[?] The eyes and ears stand so perpetually open to all things, that they never want an object to bring to mind the experience of that which pleased the body so well. And this stirs up the desire to enjoy it, yet all without

*No wonder the Light is no more known, while the darness is so much loved.*

fascination: The objects are multifarious, the enjoyment can be but single and transient and the causes incessant.

Now where this operateth in us after this manner by education and example in manners and customs which are regulated by Opinion, and not by the *true Light*, that men live altogether therein, is it any wonder that here (in these men) there is so little, or no operation of the *Light*? Not at all.

We are so involved into the desire of that which is high in the World, so overwhelmed in pleasures, that its almost impossible for the *Light* to cause one desire after *Good* to spring or bubble up.

Where then these so contrary operations to the *Light* are, there it can never break through.

According to the nature and kind of everything is the operation thereof: Where they are opposite, the one must

give way unto the other, and that which is most powerful prevails: from whence also the effects thereof become most visible. The LIGHT notwithstanding, abides always the same, & therefore although man by sin, through his love and union to corruptible things, comes to perish, be damned, and miss of his everlasting happiness, the *Light* nevertheless which is in every man that comes into the World, abides forever unchangeable.

*No knowledge of God without this Light*

*The Light is also the first Principle of Religion.* For seeing there can be no true Religion without the knowledge of God, and no knowledge of God without this *Light*, Religion must necessarily have this *Light* for its first Principle.

God being then known by this *Light* according to the measure of knowledge which the finite & circumscribed Creature can have of the Infinite and Uncircumscribable Creator, man hath obtained a *firm Foundation*, upon which he may build all firm and lasting things: A Principle whereby he may without ever erring, guide the whole course of his life, how he is to carry himself towards God, his Neighbor, and himself, and all things else, whereby he may happily attain unto his chiefest salvation, which consisteth only in *Union with God*. And thus *this Light is therefore the first Principle of Religion*.

*The Light being found, and God hereby known, a sure foundation is discovered.*

*Without this Light, there is no power or ability at all in man to do any good.*

*Where there is nothing to work, there nothing can be wrought.*

This must first raise him and quicken him out of the death of sin. 'Tis folly to expect anything, where nothing is, there's no effect without a cause: There must be something then which must cause a man to act, if he does anything.



And this cause must have in it whatsoever the effect produced hath in it: As for example:

*Where any see, there must needs be LIGHT, if the effect of Light be produced, Light must do it, and nothing else.*

*Where any see there must needs be LIGHT.*

And therefore, is it not a silly thing that all men would have people do this or that as good, and leave this or that as evil, because they tell them so, without any more ado, or at best assigning only the accustomed motives wherefore, & think they have reason [to], just as this were enough? Who can see such effects are hereby required, included in this Cause? Not I, for my part.

Experience also teacheth us the same; else how could it all pass away in a train and custom, without any fruit?

*These are therefore not the right means:*  
 But such we must endeavor to furnish people with, Means from whence Power may issue forth to do that which they are exhorted to. Such is the nature of man, that he is forced to chuse that which he judgeth to be best, before the worst, and is always willing to change for the best.

*'Tis folly to expect effects from unsuitable Means.*

Now if it so happens (as for the most part it doth) that a man chuseth the worst before the best, 'tis for the want of knowledge, and contrary to his aim, and so he erreth, not being led by the *true Light*.

*No man wittingly chuseth his own harm, but being blinded.*

Here then it should be begun, 'tis easie leading of a man to that which of himself he is desirous of: If those now who make it their Work to teach others, *were but Lead themselves by the true Light*, knowing better things [than] those to which the multitude are link't so fast with love, they would be able to hold them forth clearly to others: And so making it their

*Therefore to undeceive the judgement is the first step.*

continual work, 'twere impossible their labour should be fruitless, for people knowing better, would better do. Who

*The Judgement being amended, the will and affections must follow.*

knows that which we judge better: *Herehence*, not by force, but very lightly, and of it self, they came from time to time to be worn out; and pass away, that there's now no desire nor motion moving thereunto. How may we think then it

*If you know the truth, the truth shall make you free, saith Christ.*

then should come to be esteemed more glorious than all bodily things, so much the more powerful would be the annihilation of those things in which all men, even to old age, yea, death it self do take so much delight, and then we might hope and expect that those things which are (indeed) alone worthy to be known would gain entrance, & being brought forth in the *Light*, would be also owned and received by every one, according to the measure in which they should stand in the *same Light*.

Hence from within, the amendment and conversion is to be waited for, from within it must begin, if with foundation,

*No man will part with what he judges best, till he sees something better, and then he need not be forced.*

the outward then will follow of it self: The weakest must give way to the strongest, all depends but upon the knowledge of something better, to make a true and lasting change. Therefore to hold this forth to men, is the best thing we can give them.

*This Light is the inward ear by which alone, and by no other, the voice of God that is the Truth, can he heard.*

By this alone must the sence and mind of him that would signifie any thing by words or any outward sign, be comprehended and understood. *So that if the Truth of God be presented to a man who stands not in the Light of Truth, 'tis impossible he should understand it, although he hears and comprehends the words after his manner, yet he is still fenced off from its true sence and meaning thereof.*

Hence, therefore, it is, that amongst so many hearers there are so few that have ears to hear.

He that hears *Truth* aright, that is, understands it well, must not stand out of, but in the *Truth* it self.

Therefore neither is it any wonder that all men do not understand and conceive those things that are brought forth by the *Light*. Those only that stand in it, are alone (and no other) capable thereof.

The case being thus, we see of how great concernment it is continually to exhort and excite men to turn in to the *Light* that is in them, that so they may go on to such a condition and measure therein, as to be fit to understand aright *the Word*, that is the *Truth of God*, because out of this there can be nothing understood and concluded from the words and writings given forth from the *Light*, but meer opinion & consequently errors. *This Light, Christ, &c. is the truth & word of God, as hath been already said, and in every way appears by what we have hitherto laid down: For this is a living Word, and transmiteth man from death to life, is powerful, & enableth a man to bear witness of it self every where.*

*This is the one and first thing necessary.*

*This is also the true Rule according unto which all our actions are to be squared.*

This hath the pro-eminence before any Writing, Scripture, Doctrine, or anything else that we meet from without. *We are born into the world, and brought up as every*

body knows. From the very first we hear differences, every one pretends that he knows the matter, and hath the truth: One holds forth on this, another that to us: *If now the Light which is in every man that comes into the world, shall not be the judge, whither shall we go? To believe all is impossible, to reject all, no less: Who shall be Judge here? Who else can be but the Light within us? For whatsoever comes from without, is the thing to be judged of: Who then fitter? seeing this is infallible.*

Again, Is not this (the *Light*) that by which we must see and know God, and so consequently that by which we must judge all things Divine? Certainly 'tis: then it follows also, That we can judge of no Doctrine, no Book that is Divine, but by this *Light* and judging it thereby to be Divine, it cannot but be truly so. As for example, If we experience that the

*No man farther knows the Scriptures, then he is what the Scripture speaks.*

Book called the BIBLE, in regard of the Divine Doctrine therein comprised, hath *such an harmony with that in which God is known*, that he must needs have been the Author of it, there

cannot rationally any more powerful demonstration be demanded. With them that are thus, *the Scripture may become living and powerful, and not a dead letter*, as it must

*No other sure Foundation can be laid.*

needs be to those men who have no feeling of this thing. And from hence then it's apparent, seeing *this Light* must

stand before all things whatsoever that we meet with from without, that then *man must first of all be directed to this*, for without it what profit is there (I pray) to be reaped any where by any external sign but by it[?] Lay the Book of

Scripture freely before any man, let him also have all the fitness (the Universities can give him) to look into in its proper Language in which it may have been first written, what will all be without *the Light*? Nothing. *The letters, the words are not the Scriptures*, but the mind alone is the Scripture, and this meaning can never be truly and justly hit, but by those alone that stand in the same *Light*, out of which the Scriptures proceeded.

These are they then to whom the Scripture is a *Cowitness* and as a seal of their being Sons of God: while by experience they find themselves, every one according to his measure, in the *same condition in which the Saints formerly were*, who spake & writ all those things comprehended in the Book of the Scripture, *these then have the true understanding and meaning of the Scriptures*, not those that *Imagine unto themselves a meaning* by opinion and guess, through a thousand imaginations, without the least assurance of not erring: which becomes the very ground of all jangling and contention.

*In fine, and lastly. This Light in every man is the means to come to the knowledge of God.* And seeing all external signs must needs presuppose this knowledge: therefore its self must needs be immediate, without my external sign: that signs must presuppose such a knowledge, is undeniable, for these signs must either be *words or effects, works or miracles*.

*Where the knowledge of God is not, there all external things are of no value. Therefore this knowledge must needs first be immediate, and altogether independent to all externals.*

If *Words*, we see at first an impossibility in the thing it self: for *Words are created and finite*, and God who should make known himself by them, *uncreated and infinite*: and therefore here is so infinite a difference, that

*Words too weak to give the knowledge of God.*

there is no *manner* of agreement, nor any thing, in the [words] by which they might be capable to do it. But again, if you flye to the *meaning* of words, as being fit for such a thing, then that which we say will more manifestly appear: As put case for example sake, that GOD about to make known himself by words, should say, I AM GOD, and that this should he the sign by which he would make himself known, we see clearly, that it would be impossible for a man at first to know God by this: For if he comprehend anything out of the sence of the words, he must needs formerly have the signification of the word GOD, and what he is to understand by it: In like manner if God maketh his will known to man, the *knowledge of God* (which hath its original from the true *Light*) *must precede and convince him*, that that (Manifestation) can be from none but God alone, whereupon he's sufficiently assured.

If by *Effects, (or outward miraculous Works)* 'tis the same thing; for these are no less *created*, no less *terminated*: And

*Many things may seem Divine Miracles, which are produced by a hidden concurrence of many natural causes: therefore without the knowledge of God precedes, no man can discern in this case. From whence undeniably is concluded, That these can neither be any sure foundation, or certain, nay nor possible means to bring any to the knowledge of God.*

though we might observe something in the nature of a thing, which might be too difficult for the power of any creature, which we know to effect: Yet this at the utmost would be a demonstration taken from our *impotency*, and not from *the nature and all operations of it*; and this kind of demonstration cannot be certain and stable, till we were able clearly and distinctly to see that there was

*not a concurrency of many causes* to produce such an effect, but that it must needs have been caused by an *infinite and unlimited cause*, whom we call God: But who knoweth this? Or who can declare it?

Add to this, *That the knowledge of God in all things must first be, before the knowledge of any creature or particular thing; so no particular thing without this, can be well known: and consequently is altogether incapable to come to know God by, or certainly to make known himself to man by.*

Go to then, *Without thy self, O man, thou hast no means to look for, by which thou maist know God. Thou must abide within thy self, to the Light that's in thee thou must turn thee, there thou wilt find it, and no where else.*

GOD is considered in Himself, *nearest unto thee and every man.* He that goes forth of himself to any Creature, thereby to know God, *departs* from God, and so much the further, as he comes more to mistake himself by it. This thou must *shun*, and the contrary *mind*, viz. *Mind the Light that's in thee*, by it to work, unmovably and faithfully to persevere.

*God considered in himself, is nearest unto every man than himself, because he penetrates the most inward and intimate parts of man, and is the life of the inmost spirit, as the spirit is of the soul, & the soul of the body: Therefore is he worthy to be turned to, minded, sought, waited upon, and feared. Let all blind Leaders that say 'tis not God that appeareth in the hearts of the wicked, hear this; and all fools that say, In their heart there is no God.*

## EPILOGUE:

### *Margaret Fell and Baruch Spinoza*

We are grateful to Richard Popkin and Michael Signer for introducing to us another aspect of the Quaker-Spinoza connection in Amsterdam around 1660.<sup>1</sup> Their excellent scholarship has added a new dimension to our understanding of early Quakerism.

The story begins with a Millenarian vision revealed to Margaret Fell. Biblical scholars of her time had calculated that 1,656 years had elapsed between the Creation and the Flood. The numerological wisdom of the 17th Century, widely shared by thoughtful people including the Dutch Collegiants, suggested that something of similar religious moment would happen around the year AD 1656. Margaret Fell, among others, concluded that the most logical happening would be the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. She accordingly addressed an evangelical message, called *A Loving Salutation*, to the Jews of the world. Perhaps she did so in the hope that it would be easier for Jews to accept the Quaker version of Christian teaching than those of other sects.

Her letter needed to be translated into Hebrew at a time when Jews were legally excluded from England. She sought the help of the Quaker community in Amsterdam to find a translator. After some difficulty the letter was translated, but the identity of the translator has been a puzzle. Popkin amasses persuasive evidence that it was none other than Spinoza, and that this translation was Spinoza's first published work. William Ames, the English Quaker described in the *Preface*, was the person who recruited Spinoza for the task.



At the time, Ames was the leader of the English Quaker mission in Amsterdam. Much of the information in this *Epilogue* was drawn by Popkin from letters back to England penned by Ames or by William Caton, his young assistant.

Popkin's work offers evidence that there was a rich and complex interaction among Quakers, Collegiants, and Spinoza in Amsterdam. Spinoza's later reputation as one of the giants of religious humanism should not cause us to give his influence undue weight. When he first met Ames in 1657, in Amsterdam, he was a young man of twenty-five, recently expelled from his synagogue, and seeking language to express unconventional religious insights. Ames's account of his meeting with "a Jew" cautiously avoided mention of Spinoza's name. But the Jew's ideas strongly suggest his identity. In Popkin's words, "the Jew" at the time of his initial encounter with Ames had already developed an affinity, later evident in Spinoza's work, "for the overall Quaker view about the need to know Moses, the Prophets and Christ inwardly, through the light."

According to Popkin, Quaker influence on Spinoza's thinking is most clear in the work of Samuel Fisher. Fisher was the first university graduate to join Friends. Adept at Hebrew and Greek, he had been a Baptist minister before becoming a Friend in 1654. Margaret Fell's *A Loving Salutation*, as published in Hebrew, had a two-page addition by Fisher, exhorting Jews to convert.

In 1660 Fisher published a massive work of Biblical criticism, *A Rustic Alarum to the Rabbies*, a radical attack on the Protestant claim that the Scripture is the Word of God, and what Christopher Hill has called the most radical Bible criticism of the 17th Century.<sup>2</sup> Many of his arguments are echoed in Spinoza's *A Treatise on Religious and Political Philosophy (Tractatus TheologicoPoliticus)*, published ten years later. Popkin cites the following passages from A

*Treatise* as indicating a clear Quaker influence on Spinoza:

He who firmly believes that God, out of mercy and grace with which he directs all things, forgives the sins of men, and who feels his love of God kindled thereby, he, I say, does really know Christ according to the Spirit and Christ is in him.

God, or the Exemplar of true life, may be, whether *fire or spirit or light*, or thought or what not...

Popkin's discovery that Fisher and Spinoza were both associated with *A Loving Salutation* adds weight to the assumption that Spinoza was directly influenced by Fisher's work.

Also noted by Popkin was a marked similarity of concept between *The Light upon the Candlestick* and Spinoza's *Improvement of the Understanding*, which he attributes to Spinoza's influence on Balling and, through this tract, on English Quakerism.

Finally, Popkin's research adds strength to Rufus Jones's conclusion, cited in the *Preface*, that the Collegiants were accepted by English Quakers as fellows of the spirit.

Although there was this close association and communication among these various groups, all in Amsterdam was not sweetness and light. Adam Boreel, chief of the Collegiants, and Peter Serrarius, a fellow Millenarimn, were in dispute with Quakers on some issues. In addition, there was also present in Amsterdam a loyal follower of James Naylor, the greatest embarrassment to the young Quaker mission. Her name was Ann Cargill. She was so disruptive of Quaker activity in Amsterdam that Caton wrote to Margaret Fell that "that wicked woman that went out from the Truth" was causing all sorts of problems.

Returning to our main theme, it seems right to conclude that the interaction among Quakers, Collegiants and Spinoza was of substantial mutual benefit. It also seems clear that

the flow of influence was not linear but circular, with Quakers, Collegiants and Spinoza at the service of one another in humankind's unending pursuit of ways to think about the nature of the Ineffable Other. We may hope that some future scholar will solve the major remaining puzzle presented by *The Light upon the Candlestick*: who decided to put William Ames's name to Peter Balling's work, and why?

— *Kingdon Swayne / Sally Rickerman*

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> In *Spinoza's Earliest Publication* cited in the preface, Signer did the analysis and comparison of the English and its Hebrew translation as well as the quality of the Hebrew. Popkin, however, in the Introduction, wrote of the research into the relationships of the participants. Therefore we refer to Popkin only in this discussion.

<sup>2</sup> *The World Turned Upside Down*, Christopher Hill (London 1972), chapter 10, pp. 186-207.

PETER BALLING **The Light upon the Candlestick**



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Quaker Universalist Fellowship

Route 1, Box 28-3

Millboro, VA 24460

email: [friends@universalistfriends.org](mailto:friends@universalistfriends.org)

<http://www.universalistfriends.org/>