

GEORGE FOX

Questions

1. Why should so trivial an incident as that of the beer-drinking produce in him so profound a disturbance?
2. What are the outstanding characteristics of this disturbance? Which of the hospital cases does it most resemble?
3. At what point does Fox's recovery begin? How do you explain it?
4. What did Fox mean by the word "opening?" In which of our hospital cases have we encountered such "mechanisms?" How do you account for the fact that Fox, relying as he did so implicitly upon these openings, did not get into more trouble? Why, in other words, do they seem in his case to have been so relatively trustworthy?
5. Fox apparently thought of himself as the unique spokesman of the Lord to the people of his time, comparable only to the old Hebrew prophets. To what extent would you agree with him?
6. After his initial disturbance, Fox enters upon an adventurous career as preacher and organizer. He is subjected to imprisonment many times for considerable periods and under the most intolerable conditions, but he endured all these trials with remarkable fortitude and serenity. After twenty years of inner peace he has another severe disturbance. How do you explain these facts?
7. At the time of his death Fox had a following of some forty thousand persons and the Society of Friends which he founded has persisted to the present day and has been the source of some of our finest religious influences. How do you explain Fox's power as a leader of men?

R e f e r e n c e s

George Fox	Journal	edited by Rufus Jones
James	Varieties of Religious Experience	pp. 7 ff
Pratt	Religious Consciousness	pp. 67 & 155
Boisen	Exploration of the Inner World	Chap. 2

G E O R G E F O X

Among our men of religious genius there is none whose experience is of greater interest to the student of mental illness than the great founder of the Society of Friends. His experience is at once comparable in severity to the acutely disturbed mental patient and also of unquestioned validity from the standpoint of the results attained. He has moreover left us a remarkable account of that experience in a document known as his "Journal." The title is somewhat misleading, for the book is really a story of his life written chiefly during his imprisonment in Worcester Jail, when he was about fifty years old. But even tho the account of the primary disturbed period is colored by his later experience and attitudes, that account is unquestionably authentic and to the highest degree self-revealing. The following passages give the high points in this account. The references are to the somewhat abridged edition edited by Rufus M. Jones and published by Ferris and Leach in Philadelphia in 1903.

Early Years

I was born in the month called July, 1624, at Drayton-in-the-Clay, in Leicestershire. My father's name was Christopher Fox; he was by profession a weaver, an honest man; and there was a Seed of God in him. The neighbors called him Righteous Christopher. My mother was an upright woman; her maiden name was Mary Lago, of the family of the Lagos, and of the stock of the martyrs.

In my youth I had a gravity and stayedness of mind and spirit not usual in children; insomuch that when I saw old men behave lightly and wantonly towards each other, I had a dislike thereof raised in my heart, and said within myself, "If ever I come to be a man, surely I shall not do so, nor be wanton."

When I came to eleven years of age I knew pureness and righteousness; for while a child I was taught how to walk to be kept pure. The Lord taught me to be faithful in all things, and to act faithfully two ways, viz., inwardly to God, and outwardly to men, and to keep Yea and Nay in all things.

As I grew up, my relations thought to have made me a priest, but others persuaded to the contrary. Whereupon I was put to a man who was a shoe maker by trade, and dealt in wool. He also used grazing and cattle; and a great deal went through my hands. While I was with him he was blessed, but after I left him he broke and came to nothing.

I never wronged a man or woman in all that time; for the Lord's power was with me and over me, to preserve me. While I was in that service I used in my dealings the word Verily, and it was a common saying among those that knew me, "If George says verily, there is no altering him." When boys and rude persons would laugh at me, I let them alone and went my way; but people had generally a love to me for my innocence and honesty. (p.65-67)

His Call

When I came towards nineteen years of age, being upon business at a fair, one of my cousins, whose name was Bradford, having another professor with him, came and asked me to drink part of a jug of beer with them. I, being thirsty, went in with them, for I loved any one who had a sense of good, or that sought after the Lord.

When we had drunk a glass apiece, they began to drink healths, and called for more drink, agreeing together that he that would not drink should pay all. I was grieved with any who made profession who should offer to do so. They grieved me very much having never had such a thing done to me before by any sort of people. Wherefore I rose up, and putting my hand in my pocket, took out a groat, and laid it upon the table before them, saying, "If so it be, I will leave you."

So I went away; and when I had done my business returned home; but did not go to bed that night, nor could I sleep, but sometimes walked up and down, and sometimes prayed and cried to the Lord, who said to me,

3 GEORGE FOX, An Autobiography

"Thou seest how young people go together into vanity, and old people into the earth; thou must forsake all, young and old, keep out of all, and be as a stranger unto all."

Then at the command of God, the ninth of the Seventh month, 1643, I left my relations, and broke off all familiarity or fellowship with young or old. (p. 68)

The First Period of Disturbance

As I thus traveled through the country, professors took notice of me, and sought to be acquainted with me; but I was afraid of them, for I was sensible that they did not possess what they professed.

During the time I was at Barnet a strong temptation to despair came upon me. I then saw how Christ was tempted, and mighty troubles I was in. Sometimes I kept my self retired in my chamber, and often walked solitary in the Chase to wait upon the Lord. I wondered at those things that they should come upon me. I looked upon myself and said, "Was I ever so before?" Then I thought, because I had forsaken my relations I had done amiss against them.

So I was brought to call to mind all my time that I had spent, and to consider whether I had wronged any, but temptations grew more and more, and I was tempted almost to despair, and when Satan could not effect his design upon me that way, he laid snares and baits to draw me to despair.

I was about twenty years of age when these exercises came upon me; and some years I continued in that condition, in great trouble; and fain I would have put it from me. I went to many a priest to look for comfort, but found no comfort there.

After some time I went into my own country again, and continued about a year, in great sorrow and trouble, and walked many nights by myself.

.....As I was walking in a field on a First-day morning, the Lord opened to me that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ; and I wondered at it, because it was the common belief of people. But I saw it clearly as the Lord opened it to me, and was satisfied, and admired the goodness of the Lord, who had opened this thing, unto me that morning. This struck at priest Stephen's ministry, namely, that "to be bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to make a man fit for the ministry of Christ." So that which opened in me I saw struck at the priests ministry.

.....Now, though I had great openings, yet great trouble and temptation came many times upon me; so that I wished in the day that it were night, and when it was night I wished for day

I fasted much, walked abroad in solitary places many days, and often took my Bible, and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places till night came on; and frequently in the night walked mournfully about by myself; for I was a man of sorrows in the time of the first workings of the

Lord in me.....

Though my first exercises and troubles were very great, yet were they not so continual but that I had some intermissions, and I was sometimes brought into such a heavenly joy that I thought I had been in Abraham's bosom.

But as I had forsaken the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those esteemed the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. When all my hopes in them and in all men were gone so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Jesus Christ, that can speak to thy condition;" and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.....

About this time there was a great meeting of the Baptists at Broughton, in Leicestershire, with some that had separated from them, and people of other nations went thither, and I went also. Not many of the Baptists came, but many others were there. The Lord opened my mouth, and the everlasting truth was declared among them and the power of the Lord was over them all. For in that day the Lord's power began to spring, and I had great openings in the Scriptures.

I went back into Nottinghamshire, and there the Lord showed me that the natures of those things, which were hurtful without, were within, in the hearts and minds of wicked men. The natures of dogs, swine, vipers, of Sodom and Egypt, Pharaoh, Cain, Ishmael, Esau, etc.; the natures of these I saw within, though people had been looking without. I cried to the Lord, saying, "Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit these evils?" and the Lord answered, "That it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions!" and in this I saw the infinite love of God. . . .

When this man was buried a great work of the Lord fell upon me, to the admiration of many, who thought I had been dead, and many came to see me for about fourteen days. I was very much altered in countenance and person, as if my body had been new moulded or changed. My sorrows and troubles began to wear off, and tears of joy dropped from me, so that I could have wept day and night with tears of joy to the Lord, in humility and brokenness of heart.

I saw into that which was without end, things which cannot be uttered, and of the greatness and infinitude of the love of God which cannot be expressed by words. For I had been brought through the very ocean of darkness and death, and through and over the power of Satan, by the eternal, glorious power of Christ; even through that darkness was I brought, which covered over all the world, and which chained down all and shut up all in death. (p. 69-89)

His Message

On a certain time, as I was walking in the fields, the Lord said unto me, "Thy name is written in the Lamb's book of life, which was before the foundation of the world"; and as the Lord spoke it, I believed, and saw in it the new birth. Some time after the Lord commanded me to go abroad into the world, which was like a bricry, thorny wilderness.

When I came in the Lord's mighty power with the Word of life into the world, the world swelled, and made a noise like the great raging waves of the sea. Priests and professors, magistrates and people, were all like a sea when I came to proclaim the day of the Lord amongst them, and to preach repentance to them.

I was sent to turn people from darkness to the Light, that they might receive Christ Jesus; for to as many as should receive him in this Light, I saw He would give power to become the sons of God; which power I had obtained by receiving Christ.

But with and by this divine power and Spirit of God, and the Light of Jesus, I was to bring people off from all their own ways, to Christ, the new and living way; and from their churches, which men had made and gathered, to the Church in God, the general assembly written in heaven, of which Christ is the head. And as I was to bring them off from the world's teachers, made by men, to learn of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, of whom the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him"; and off from all the world's worships, to know the Spirit of Truth in the inward parts, and to be led thereby; that in it they might worship the Father of spirits, who seeks such to worship Him. And I saw that they worshipped not in the Spirit of Truth, knew not what they worshipped.

And I was to bring people off from all the world's religions, which are vain, that they might know the pure religion; might visit the fatherless, the widows, and the strangers, and keep themselves from the spots of the world.....

Moreover, when the Lord sent me forth into the world, He forbade me to put off my hat to any, high or low; and I was required to Thee and Thou all men and women, without any respect to rich or poor, great or small. (p. 102-105)

What He thought of Himself

Now I was come up in spirit through the flaming sword, into the paradise of God. All things were new; and all the creation gave unto me another smell than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness; being renewed into the image of God by Christ Jesus, to the state of Adam, which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me; and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue..... Great things did the Lord lead me into, and wondrous depths were opened unto me, beyond what can by words be declared (p. 97)

I showed the people his deceit; and directed them to Christ, the true teacher within, declaring that God was come to teach His people himself, and to bring them off from all the world's teachers and hirings; that they might come to receive freely from Him. Then, warning them of the day of the Lord that was coming upon all flesh, I passed thence without much opposition.

The Lord had said unto me that if but one man or woman were raised by His power to stand and live in the same Spirit that the prophets and apostles were in who gave forth the Scripture; that man or woman should

shake all the country in their profession for ten miles around..... Therefore we warned all, wherever we met them, of the day of the Lord that was coming upon them. (p. 149)

After this I returned into Westmorland, and spoke through Kendal on a market-day. So dreadful was the power of God in me, that people flew like chaff before me into their houses. I warned them to hearken to the voice of God in their own hearts, who was now come to teach His people Himself.....

I told him experience was one thing; but to receive and go with a message, and to have a Word from the Lord, as the prophets and apostles had had and done, and as I had done to them, this was another thing. And therefore I put it to them again, "Can any of you say you have ever had a command or word from the Lord immediately at any time?" but none of them could say so. (p. 166-7)

His Ministry of Healing

Coming to Mansfield-Woodhouse, I found there a distracted woman under the doctor's hand, with her hair loose about her ears. He was about to let her blood, she being first bound, and many people about her, holding her by violence; but he could get no blood from her.

I desired them to unbind her and let her alone, for they could not touch the spirit in her by which she was tormented. So they did unbind her; and I was moved to speak to her, and in the name of the Lord to bid her be quiet; and she was so. The Lord's power settled her mind, and she mended. Afterwards she received the truth, and continued in it to her death; and the Lord's name was honoured.

Many great and wonderful things were wrought by the heavenly power in those days; for the Lord made bare His omnipotent arm, and manifested His power, to the astonishment of many, by the healing virtue whereby many have been delivered from great infirmities. And the devils were made subject through his name; of which particular instances might be given, beyond what this unbelieving age is able to receive or bear. (p.112-113)

The Bloody City of Lichfield

As I was walking with several Friends, I lifted up my head and saw three steeple-house spires, and they struck at my life. I asked them what place that was. They said, "Lichfield." Immediately the Word of the Lord came to me that I must go thither. Being come to the house we were going to, I wished the Friends to walk into the house, saying nothing to them of whither I was to go. As soon as they were gone I stepped away, and went by my eye over hedge and ditch till I came within a mile of Lichfield, where, in a great field, shepherds were keeping their sheep.

Then was I commanded by the Lord to pull off my shoes. I stood still, for it was winter; and the Word of the Lord was like a fire in me. So I put off my shoes, and left them with the shepherds; and the poor shepherds trembled, and were astonished. Then I walked on about a mile, and as soon as I was got within the city, the Word of the Lord came to me again, "Cry, 'Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield!'" So I went up and down the streets

crying with a loud voice, "Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield!"

It being market-day I went into the market-place, and to and fro in the several parts of it, and made stands, crying as before, "Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield!" And no one laid hands on me.

As I went thus crying through the streets, there seemed to me to be a channel of blood running down the streets, and the market-place appeared like a pool of blood.

When I had declared what was upon me, and felt myself clear, I went out of the town in peace, and, returning to the shepherds, I gave them some money, and took my shoes of them again. But the fire of the Lord was so in my feet, and all over me, that I did not matter to put on my shoes again, and was at a stand whether I should or no, till I felt freedom from the Lord so to do; then, after I had washed my feet, I put on my shoes again.

After this deep consideration came upon me, for what reason I should be sent to cry against that city, and call it the bloody city! For though the Parliament had had the minster one while, and the King another, and much blood had been shed in the town during the wars between them, yet that was no more than had befallen many other places. But afterwards I came to understand, that in the Emperor Diocletian's time a thousand Christians were martyred in Lichfield. (p.132-133)

His Marriage

I had seen from the Lord a considerable time before, that I should take Margaret Fell to be my wife. And when I first mentioned it to her she felt the answer of Life from God thereunto. But though the Lord had opened this thing to me, yet I had not received a command from the Lord for the accomplishing of it then. Wherefore I let the thing rest, and went on in the work and service of the Lord as before, according as he led me; travelling up and down in this nation, and through Ireland.

But now being at Bristol, and finding Margaret Fell there, it opened in me from the Lord that the thing should be accomplished. After we had discoursed the matter together, I told her, if she also was satisfied with the accomplishing of it now, she should first send for her children; which she did. When the rest of her daughters were come, I asked both them and her sons-in-law if they had anything against it, or for it; and they all severally expressed their satisfaction therein.

Then I asked Margaret if she had fulfilled and performed her husbands will to her children. She replied, "The children know that." Whereupon I asked them whether, if their mother married, they would lose by it. And I asked Margaret whether she had done anything in lieu of it, which might answer it to the children.

So, after I had thus acquainted the children with it, our intention of marriage was laid before Friends, both privately and publicly, to their full satisfaction. (p.468-469)

His Interview with Oliver Cromwell

After some time Captain Drury brought me before the Protector himself at Whitchall. It was in a morning, before he was dressed, and one Harvey,

who had come a little among Friends, but was disobedient, waited upon him. When I came in I was moved to say, "Peace be in this house"; and I exhorted him to keep in the fear of God, that he might receive wisdom from Him, that by it he might be directed, and order all things under his hand to God's glory.

I spoke much to him of Truth, and much discourse I had with him about religion; wherein he carried himself very moderately. But he said we quarrelled with priests, whom he called ministers. I told him I did not quarrel with them, but that they quarrelled with me and my friends. "But," said I, "if we own the prophets, Christ, and the apostles, we cannot hold up such teachers, prophets, and shepherds, as the prophets, Christ, and the apostles declared against; but we much declare against them by the same power and Spirit."

Then I showed him that the prophets, Christ, and the apostles declared freely, and against them that did not declare freely; such as preached for filthy lucre, and divined for money, and preached for hire, and were covetous and greedy, that could never have enough; and that they that have the same spirit that Christ, and the prophets, and the apostles had, could not but declare against all such now, as they did then. As I spoke, he several times said it was very good, and it was truth. I told him that all Christendom (so called) had the Scriptures, but they wanted the power and Spirit that those had who gave forth the Scriptures; and that was the reason they were not in fellowship with the Son, nor with the Father, nor with the Scriptures, nor one with another.

Many more words I had with him; but people coming in, I drew a little back. As I was turning, he caught me by the hand, and in tears he said, "Come again to my house; for if thou and I were but an hour of a day together, we should be nearer one to the other"; adding that he wished me no more ill than he did to his own soul; and admonished him to hearken to God's voice, that he might stand in his counsel, and obey it; and if he did so, that would keep him from hardness of heart; but if he did not hear God's voice, his heart would be hardened. He said it was true.

Then I went out; and when Captain Drury came out after me he told me the Lord Protector had said I was at liberty, and might go whither I would. (p. 213-215)

The Second Disturbed Period

As I was walking down a hill, a great weight and oppression fell upon my spirit. I got on my horse again, but the weight remained so that I was hardly able to ride.

Here I lay, exceedingly weak, and at last lost both hearing and sight. Several Friends came to me from London; and I told them that I should be a sign to such as would not see, and such as would not hear the Truth.

Under great sufferings and travails, sorrows and oppressions, I lay for several weeks, whereby I was brought so low and weak in body that few thought I could live.

I went to the widow Dry's at Enfield, where I lay all that winter,

warring in spirit with the evil spirits of the world, that warred against Truth and Friends. For there were great persecutions at this time; some meeting-houses were pulled down and many were broken up by soldiers.

I was under great sufferings at this time, beyond what I have words to declare. For I was brought into the deep, and saw all the religions of the world, and people that lived in them. And I saw the priests that held them up; who were as a company of men-eaters, eating up the people like bread, and gnawing the flesh from off their bones. But as for true religion, and worship, and ministers of God, alack! I saw there was none amongst those of the world that pretended to it.

After some time it pleased the Lord to allay the heat of this violent persecution; and I felt in spirit an overcoming of the spirits of those men-eaters that had stirred it up and carried it on to that height of cruelty. I was outwardly very weak; and I plainly felt, and those friends that were with me, and that came to visit me, took notice, that as the persecution ceased I came from under the travails and sufferings that had lain with such weight upon me; so that towards the spring I began to recover, and to walk up and down, beyond the expectation of many, who did not think I could ever have gone abroad again. (p.476-481)
