

ANCIENT AND MODERN MUGGLETONIANS.

By ALEXANDER GORDON, M. A.

ON the evening of the 14th of February last, while the members of this learned society were enjoying the bounties of providence at the Alexandra Hotel, the writer of the following paper was hospitably entertained by the Muggle-tonians of London, at their chief annual festival. During the week which followed, he was kindly permitted to examine and arrange the curious store of manuscripts in the possession of this singular community. Having thus so recently imbibed from Muggle-tonian sources, both classical and convivial, he may, perhaps, be allowed to plead the fact as his excuse for once more thrusting the present subject under the notice of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool.

At the outset it is necessary to state, that the much greater accumulation of materials than was anticipated has compelled the omission of whole sections of the subject. There is no room here for any discussion of the principles of Muggle-tonian philosophy and theology. This part of the inquiry will, accordingly, be left precisely in the condition in which it was left on a former occasion. It would scarcely be possible to enter satisfactorily into any such discussion, without trespassing into a region marked "dangerous" by a very salutary law of this Society.

Let it be assumed, then, that the Society is in possession of the Six Cardinal Principles of Muggle-tonianism, viz.,

1. That God and the Man Christ Jesus are synonymous expressions.

2. That the Devil and Human Reason are synonymous expressions.
3. That the Soul dies and rises again with the Body.
4. That Heaven is a place above the Stars.
5. That, at present, Hell is nowhere, but that this Earth, darkened after the last Judgment, will be Hell.
6. That the Angels are the only beings of Pure Reason.

Let it also be assumed that the Society will recollect by what reaction from the pantheistic spirit which Muggleton detected in Jacob Behmen, in the Ranters, and in the Quakers, these Six Principles were evolved and shaped. And now let us proceed to resume the thread of the historical narrative.

The result of further researches has been very much to confirm the impression that the main interest of Muggletonian history, both theological and biographical, is to be found at its outset, and is concentrated in the personal career of the honest London tailor, whose name is identified with the system which his cousin Reeve claimed to have received by immediate revelation from heaven.

We have traced already the early history of these two men, and brought them to the point of their joint appearance in the world of London as prophets of the Lord; "Witnesses of the Spirit," as they most commonly call themselves. This was in the spring of 1652. In the ferment of conflicting religious opinions which then agitated the mind of London, the new prophets were sure of a hearing, at least for a time. The crowd that had listened to John Robins, and wondered at Thomas Tany, quickly gathered round Reeve and Muggleton. "There came," says the latter, "a many people to discourse with us, and asked questions about many things in matters of religion, and we answered them to all questions whatsoever could arise out

of the heart of men. Some few were satisfied and believed; and many despised.”*

To place their position in a more definite form before their admirers, John Reeve, assisted by his cousin, wrote an account of his illumination, and of the leading principles of his doctrine, which he termed *A transcendent Spirituall Treatise*. It was printed, but not published, for fear of the ordinance against blasphemy; indeed it would have been impossible to obtain a license for its publication. The crowded title-page bears upon its face, among other matters, this advertisement — “If any of the Elect desire to speak with us concerning anything written in this Treatise, they may heare of us in Great Trinity Lane, at a Chandlers shop against one Mr. *Millis*, a brown Baker, neer the lower end of Bowlane.” The address here given is that of Muggleton’s private residence. This work is usually referred to by the title of the *Commission Book*, and is regarded as containing the credentials of the writers. On the truth of its statements they base their authority. “Many people,” we are told, “were more offended at the doctrine therein, than at the Commission”† itself, *i.e.*, at the power of declaring men saved or damned according to their faith. It was not to be supposed, considering the temper of those days, that the two Commissioners should be allowed to proceed on their way without some annoyance and persecution. Persons who had been “sentenced,” hooted after John Reeve in the streets, “There goes the Prophet that damns people!” Little boys pursued him through Paul’s Churchyard with the cry “Prophet! Prophet!” and threw gravel and stones at him, till he took refuge within the sacred walls. One Mrs. Turner, whose husband it seems was willing to go with the Prophet, being “exceeding wroth, and fearful that her

* *Acts of the Witnesses of the Spirit*, 2nd edition, 1764, p. 48.

† *Ibid.*, p. 49.

husband would be brought into trouble by it, said, if John Reeve came again to her husband, that she would run a spit in his guts." A certain Mr. Penson, in the course of a discussion with Lodowicke Muggleton, broke out at length, "'Wilt thou say I am damned to eternity?' 'Yea,' said I, 'thou art.' Then he rose up, and with both his fists smote upon my head."*

These were minor vexations. The serious troubles of the Witnesses did not begin till their enemies contrived to bring them within reach of the law. At first it seemed difficult to do so. As Lodowicke Muggleton sagaciously observed, on more than one occasion, "they could not tell what to do in it, seeing there was no law against any man for saying a man is damned."† A charge of witchcraft was suggested, but nothing came of it. And meanwhile the two cousins were making converts, and converts of some position. Among these were one Jeremiah Mount, a young gentleman of means (of whom one would like to know more—there are some letters of his in the Public Record Office which seem to imply that he got into political trouble in 1663); Captain Clark, a friend of Mount's; Captain Stasy, in the Parliamentary service; and Richard Leader, a rich New England merchant, "and a great traveller into many parts of the world; he was a religious man, but had somewhat declined the outward forms of worship, because he could find no rest there; so he applied his heart more to philosophy and the knowledge of nature than religion, for he thought he had seen the utmost of religion, and that there was nothing in it."‡

At length, in September 1653, a clergyman named Goslin, a "Cambridge scholar," as he is termed, an excise-

* *Acts of the Witnesses*, *ut supra*, pp. 49, 43, 50.

† *Ibid.*, p. 85. ‡ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

man named Ebb, a shopkeeper named Chandler, and two soldiers whose names are not given, having procured a copy of the *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, and being armed with other evidence, joined together to obtain a warrant against Reeve and Muggleton, in the Lord Mayor's court, on a charge of blasphemy in denying the Holy Trinity. After a month's duration in Newgate Jail, they were brought to trial, before the Lord Mayor, Sir John Fowke, found guilty, and committed to the Old Bridewell for a term of six months. They give but a doleful account of their prison fare. Of Newgate, for example, they say, "the boards were our bed, we had no sheets, only a poor flock bed upon the ground, and one thin blanket at top; and we paid seven groats a-week for this lodging, and thought ourselves very well used in a prison, which thing we were never acquainted with before. But we were more perplexed with the prisoners within than with the imprisonment itself." A very ludicrous and graphic account is given of violence and mischief which prevailed within Newgate walls. When Muggleton went to the gates to speak with any, the boys would snatch off his hat, and "pawn it for half a dozen of drink." Three wild highwaymen actually tried to hang poor John Reeve, with a rope tied to the beam of his cell. Nor was their importunity much more reasonable than their malice; one poor prisoner, when he got very drunk, would kneel down on his knees and say, "For Jesus Christ's sake, John Reeve, bless me, for I am a wicked sinner." Nothing like order was maintained in this miserable hateful den till the keeper employed "four condemned and convicted men" to act as underkeepers, and to help him to "shut up the prisoners every night."* In spite of the ill-treatment they suffered, our friends did not lie idle in their prison: they wrote and printed Letters and Re-

* *Acts of the Witnesses, ut supra*, pp. 73, 75.

monstrances, addressed to the Lord General Cromwell, to the Lord Mayor, and to the clergy in and about London. After leaving Bridewell, in April 1654, John Reeve composed "that spiritual and heavenly treatise, entitled *A Divine Looking-glass*, and he got it printed in the year 1656. Jeremiah Mount was at the greatest part of that charge. But the printer, being knavish and covetous, quite spoiled it in the press; he huddled it up so close together, for want of more paper, that nobody had any delight to read it through; so that it never yielded the money it cost printing."*

This was nearly John Reeve's last work. His life had a plaintive close. He went to pay a visit in 1656 to some friends at Maidstone; but here, in consequence of his passing sentence of damnation on certain persons who despised his Commission, they got a constable to apprehend him; but having timely notice of it he left in haste, and "overheated his blood with travelling to the water side, which was sixteen miles, and he went upon the water at Gravesend when he was all in a sweat, and cooled himself too soon. So he surfeited his blood, and drove him into a consumption, which killed him. He lived almost two years afterwards, but in a sick, wasting condition."† Some of his letters, written at this time, contain touching references to his poverty and ill-health. Unable to work at his trade, he was dependent on the contributions of his friends, who, he complains, "make no enquiry after me, whether I am dead or alive. I still continue very sick and weak, so that of necessity I must either mend or end in a little space."‡ His wife was also an ailing creature, and died before him, on the 29th March 1656.§ When she was gone, he had his dwelling with three

* *Acts of the Witnesses, ut supra*, p. 78.

† *Ibid.*, p. 79.

‡ *Supplement to the Book of Letters*, 1831 pp. 1, 2.

§ This date, 1656, may be strongly suspected to be an error, and should doubtless be corrected to 1658. Reeve had a daughter, for we are told (*Sp. Ep.*,

sisters, Mrs. Frances, Mrs. Roberts, and Mrs. Boner, who kept a sempstress' shop in Bishopsgate Street, near Hog-lane End; and in their house he died, "about the latter end of July 1658, in the seventh year of the Commission, and in the forty-ninth year of his life."* He was interred in Bethlehem Churchyard, an extinct burying ground, the site of which is to be looked for in Liverpool Street, opposite the Broad Street Station of the North London Railway.

His health probably never had been robust, and this gave a plaintive tone to his religion, very different, even on points in which their opinions altogether coincided, from the vigorous self-assertive spirit of his coadjutor and cousin. A remarkable illustration of this divergence of temper, or rather of nature, may be formed by comparing the relations they severally held to a distinguished religious writer of their time, with whom each came into controversy at different periods. John Reeve had seen and read a volume entitled *Divine Essays*, written in 1654 by Isaac Penington, the younger, before he joined the Society of Friends. He entered into correspondence with Penington in 1658, on the subject of this book, and addressed an Epistle to the Earl of Pembroke on the same topic. Reeve's language throughout is modest, tender, anxious, and conciliatory; to Penington he says, "though this everlasting Light have not clearly manifested itself in thy soul at present; yet because thou mayest enjoy it in due time when the Holy Spirit presents the super-excellency of it unto thy spirit, therefore suffer me to write a little of the effects of it in my own soul;" and to the Earl of Pembroke he writes, "I would not willingly wear out your patience with superfluity of words: Oh! bear with me a

p. 114) that "John Reeve's wife and his daughter did get most part of his living. One Ann Adams, who afterwards married William Cakebread of Orwell, is spoken of as 'his handmaid to guide him to friends' houses.'" (*Ibid.*, p. 530.)

* *Acts of the Witnesses*, *ut supra*, p. 80.

little, I humbly beseech you, and conceive it to be from the love of the Divine Voice of God himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, in sending me unto you and all of your sweet and tender spirit.”*

Many years after, in 1668, Isaac Penington, who had by this time been nearly twenty years a member of the Society of Friends, published *Observations on some Passages of Lodowick Muggleton*, a pamphlet to which Muggleton replied, in an *Answer to Isaac Pennington, Esq.*, couched in an exactly opposite style to that which Reeve had adopted. “I do remember,” he says, “several letters of yours to John Reeve, and of his unto you; some are yet to be seen; and this I say, your language was then very high, only it was groundless; and I suppose you had no faith in what you writ yourself; if you had, sure you would not have left that high language, and have fallen to the silly Quakers’ principles, where there is neither head nor foot, bottom nor top.” His criticism of Penington’s *Observations* is full of asperity, and he presents his own doctrine in its severest and hardest form, so that one is quite prepared to find the *Answer* closing with the sentence of damnation. He adds (and doubtless with truth), “I give not judgment on you out of any malice or hatred, but had rather you had been quiet and still, as you have been many years, since you wrote to John Reeve; if you had not written to me against me and my revelation, I should have let you alone, for I never did judge any man or woman till they did judge me first.” Yet Penington’s tone was so far from being harsh, that he had expressly said, at the close of his *Observations*, “Now as for him (notwithstanding all he hath done against the Lord, and against his people), so far am I from wishing any harm unto him, that I could wish with all my heart that it were

* *Sacred Remains*, 2nd Edition, 1752, pp. 44, 51.

possible for him to come to a true sense of the true light of God's Holy Spirit." It is very characteristic of the two Witnesses, that Reeve met and accosted such a man with a pleading persuasion, whereas Muggleton strode over him with an imperious dogmatism.

Notwithstanding his sickness, John Reeve had written, in his last hours, a book called *Joyful News from Heaven*, or *The Soul's Mortality proved*—strange work, it may be thought, for the deathbed of a man who was certainly religious. By mortality, however, as applied to the soul, Reeve was far from intending absolute extinction without possibility of revival; he meant what has sometimes been called the sleep of the soul. He held that soul and body perish together, and will, at the end of time, together rise; a doctrine entertained apparently by some of the Early Fathers of the Church; a doctrine at any rate by no means uncommon in this country; for, not to speak of such heretical communities as the Soulsleepers in the seventeenth century, the Unitarians of the school of Priestley in the eighteenth, and the Freethinking Christians in the nineteenth,* or such wayward thinkers as Richard Overton, Henry Layton, and William Coward, M.D., it may be sufficient to point out as advocates of the doctrine the well known names of John Milton, Thomas Hobbes, Henry Dodwell, Archdeacon Blackburne, Edmund Law, Bishop of Carlisle, and the late Bishop Hampden, of Hereford. Nay, it is not without significance, that of the original Forty-two Articles of Religion, published by royal proclamation in 1552, Article XL., against those who said "that the souls of such as depart hence do sleep, being without all sense, feeling or perceiving, until the day of judgment; or affirm that the souls die with their bodies, and at the last day shall be raised up with the same," was

* A small Scotch sect, called the Christadelphians, or Brethren of Christ, who have a meeting-place in Edinburgh, hold this view.

expunged by Convocation in 1562, which thus refused to condemn the opinion.

Reeve spoke of this doctrine by the name of the mortality of the soul; an appellation which *primâ facie* gives a false impression. He might almost as reasonably have called it the immortality of the body; since what he actually believed was that soul and body are found only in union, and disappear and reappear together. Of their reappearance he had no manner of doubt, though, strictly speaking, the body that rises is not the identical body that dies. When the death-sleep is over, "the soul quickens," and a spiritual body arises, shaped like the first. On awaking, death will seem but the sleep of a quarter of an hour, or the interval of a moment.

After John Reeve was dead, Lodowicke Muggleton had a clear field for the assertion of his own undivided claim to the prophetic function, and he was not slow to make use of it. It is curious to notice how, even during their joint lives, the more powerful nature of Lodowicke had gained its own way in the shaping of the system which Reeve's Commission had originated.* "You say," he writes to Walter Buchanan, in 1671, "I contradict John Reeve. To this I say I have power to do so, and I had power so to do when he was alive, and did contradict him in something when he was alive; and John Reeve wrote somewhat that was error to me, and error in itself, which I did oppose him in to his face, and he could not deny it. And yet, notwithstanding, John Reeve was infallible, and did write by an unerring spirit. This will seem a riddle, except it be unfolded thus. As to the doctrinal part contained in our writings, the Six Principles were written by an unerring infallible spirit in John Reeve, and the interpretation of Scripture written by him was infallible; but John Reeve's experience and apprehension of God's

* Penn asserts (*New Witnesses*, p. 62), that Muggleton told him he thought Reeve "hot brained and distempered in his head."

taking immediate notice of every man was an error . . . as I did prove to his face.”*

This difference of opinion, in which Reeve gave way to Muggleton, was a singular result of their strange boldness in conceiving of God as strictly humaniform, even as to shape and size. Said Reeve, in his epistle to the Earl of Pembroke, “The Creator is no such vast bodiless spirit as you have described him to be . . . he is a glorified body of flesh and bone in the likeness of a man; and the compass and substance of his glorious substance is no bigger than a man is, and the essence of it is but in one place at once. Only take notice of this, that his little eyes are so transcendently bright and glorious, that at one look or view they pierce through heaven and earth, angels and men; and at once, or one word speaking through his heavenly mouth, it entereth (if it be his pleasure) into all the spirits of men or angels.”* Reeve therefore held, in a form appropriate to his peculiar theology, the common doctrine that God exercises an immediate oversight on all human actions. Muggleton, on the other hand, affirmed that God takes notice of human actions only in virtue of “his law, written in every man’s heart, both saint and devil, and no otherwise.” Further, he affirms that “whoever doth not act well, by that law written in his heart, and doth not stand in awe of that, and fear to offend that law of conscience as if God himself did stand by, all his well-doing is but eye-service, and respected of God no more than the cutting off a dog’s neck.” “Neither,” he adds, “do I refrain from evil for fear of God’s Person seeing me, and because he seeing me will punish me; but I refrain from evil because the law written in my heart seeth all my doings, so that God need not trouble himself to watch over every man’s actions himself, for he hath placed his Law a watchman in

* *Stream from the Tree of Life*, 1758, p. 13.

* *Sacred Remains*, *ut supra*, p. 56.

every man and woman, to give notice of all their doings, whether good or evil.”* Reeve unreservedly deferred to his cousin’s judgment on this point, yet it must, I imagine, have gone severely against the grain with him.

The doctrine that God takes no immediate notice has proved a test of orthodoxy and a fertile source of division among the Muggletonians from that time to this. It has created that which forms the greatest outward distinction between them and other sects—the entire abandonment of prayer as a spiritual access to God; and indeed the abolition of formal worship of any kind. Reeve himself was by no means disposed in all cases to charge the practice of prayer with weakness or profanity. “I do not,” he says, “in the least deny the use of the tongue in prayer, and praises also, so that a man be undoubtedly moved thereto by the true light of the righteous Judge of quick and dead; but glittering words, flowing from natural parts only, in merciless men, are an abomination to our God and his tender love in our new-born people.”† Indeed there are on record some short prayers of his, and of Muggleton’s too, dispersed through their works. Nor was there in the first instance any injunction laid upon Muggletonians to abstain from frequenting the usual places of public worship. “I never did,” says Muggleton, “forbid any believer of this Commission of the Spirit to go to church; neither did John Reeve in his time; they all went to church, or to meetings. But [in his *Interpretation of the Book of Revelations*, 1665,] I had occasion to write concerning worship, and, the believers reading it, their eyes were opened to see it was idolatry to worship as the nation doth, so that many of them refrained from it. Some could not refrain because of persecution; but those that did refrain had much peace in themselves, and were better beloved with

* *Stream from the Tree of Life*, ut supra, pp. 2, 3.

† *Sacred Remains*, ut supra, p. 46.

me than the other; they that did go to worship had shame and trouble and doubting in themselves, and I let them bear their sin and never reprov'd them for it.”* At the present day strict principle induces Muggletonians to forego any attendance upon public worship, even at such occasional services as a funeral or a marriage. And in the few isolated instances in which Muggletonians indulge in the private use of prayer, the habit is regarded by their fellow believers as an inconsistent eccentricity, the sign of an immature, and so far imperfect faith.

It is odd enough, therefore, to find a caustic and amusing writer, one of whose clever books has just been reproduced, selecting the Muggletonians as extreme advocates of an exactly opposite opinion, viz., the doctrine of a particular providence. Somewhat clumsily says the *Tin Trumpet*: “Fanatics, whose inordinate conceit prompts them to believe that the Deity must be more engrossed with the affairs of an obscure Muggletonian in Ebenezer Alley, Shoreditch, than with the general and immutable laws of the universe, presumptuously wrest every unexpected occurrence in which themselves are concerned into a particular Providence, more especially if it be an escape from any kind of danger.” And again: “Even a Muggletonian would hesitate at calling this a providential intoxication.” Yet a third time: “We submit this accident to the joint and serious consideration of the Muggletonians and Phrenologists.”†

Though Muggleton managed to secure his own way in the community of which he was now the sole head, it was

* *Acts of the Witnesses*, *ut supra*, p. 147.

† *The Tin Trumpet*, published 1836, republished 1863, pp. 7, 8. Horace Smith evidently makes use of the name in entire ignorance of its history, simply for its odd sound; just as Douglas Jerrold in *Nell Gwynne, or the Prologue* (1833), makes Mrs. Snowdrop say—“Nothing now will serve her but to go upon the stage. 'Tis n't my fault; I'm sure I put the pious Mr. Muggleton under her pillow every night.”

not without opposition that he did so. His first rival arose very shortly after John Reeve's death.

At the beginning of February, 1658, the Rev. LAURENCE CLAXTON appeared in London. This Laurence Claxton describes himself as a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, holding a small living of £100 per annum. He was now forty years of age, and had a family of five children dependent on him. Although a parish priest, he seems to have been one of that numerous class who in those days were on the look out for a religion, Seekers or Waiters, as they modestly called themselves. He had been attracted by the pantheistic teaching of the Ranters, and was in the habit of preaching in this strain himself. He came to London, because he had been informed that the two Witnesses, mentioned in Revelations xi., were now to be seen and spoken with; and he was anxious to hear what they could say for themselves. John Reeve lent him one of his books; and this made a deep impression on him. "For the space of three weeks," he says, "I could not be at quiet, sleeping nor waking, going nor riding." He decided at last, after much painful uncertainty, that he must quit his "trade of preaching," resign his benefice, and trust to providence for a livelihood for himself and his little ones. At the instant when he had formed this decision these words came into his thoughts — "Remember me, how here, in this world where now thou livest, I was a poor despised Saviour, though now a rich immortal God; and therefore take no care, I will provide for thee and thine." At the same time, he adds, the Lord freely forgave him all that was past, present, and to come.*

Henceforth Claxton thoroughly threw in his lot with the fortunes of the Muggletonians. After John Reeve's death

* See *Introductory Epistle to The Right Devil Discovered, &c.*, by Laur. Claxton, 1659.

he asked leave to write in vindication and justification of the Commission of the Spirit. Muggleton gave his consent, and he accordingly wrote four books, one after another, which had a great run among his friends of the Commission, and succeeded in gaining many adherents to the cause he had at heart. Of these books the present writer has seen three in print and one in manuscript. They are written with some power, and, as one might expect, with more polish than was at the command of his associates. What seems specially to have attracted his imagination, and principally engaged his pen was the Muggletonian doctrine of the Devil, as being no invisible malign agent, but, since the fall of Eve, existing only as the unclean Reason in Man. He is merry on the applications of this doctrine. Derisively alluding to the popular portrait of a hoofed and horned King of Darkness, —the only “devil,” says he, “that ever was, is, or shall be, is for the most part as comely a creature as walks in London streets; and hath as neat a foot and a hand as any lady in the land!”* And the title of the first book he wrote was, *Look about you, for the Devil that you fear is in you.*

Claxton might have continued to render great service to Muggleton, had not his confidence in his own abilities proved fatal to his submissively working under his chief. “He grew so proud as to say that nobody could write in the vindication of this Commission, now that John Reeve was dead, but he; and to that purpose he wrote another book,

* *Right Devil*, *ut supra*, p. 22. Compare the following question and answer from Fielding's *Eurydice* (1735):

“*Mr. Spindle.* Well, but what sort of a fellow is the old gentleman, the devil, hey?”

“*Capt. Weazle.* Is he? Why, a very pretty sort of a gentleman, a very fine gentleman; but, my dear, you have seen him five hundred times already. The moment I saw him here, I remembered to have seen him shuffle cards at White's and George's, to have met him often on the Exchange, and in the Alley, and never missed him in or about Westminster Hall. I will introduce you to him.”

intituled "*The Lost Sheep Found*, 1660."* When Muggleton read this book, at the instance of several believers who complained of Claxton's lording it over them in it, he discovered that his new assistant was exalting himself as the only true Bishop (note the recovered accent of the priest, the only true Bishop) and faithful messenger of Jesus Christ; and that he was describing Muggleton as merely John Reeve's mouthpiece and no more. Whereupon Muggleton at once and for ever interdicted Laurence Claxton from writing in defence of the Commission. This was in 1660.† For a year Claxton stood out in opposition; but obtaining no followers, and finding Muggleton's power too strong for him, he humbled himself and acknowledged his fault. Muggleton accordingly forgave him, and took him again into his favour; cautiously tying him down, however, to write no more. His end is thus narrated, by the man whom he had vainly opposed. "It came to pass, when the fire destroyed the city of London, he, to get a livelihood, did engage to help persons of quality to borrow money, to build their houses again. But the persons that had the money did run away, and left Claxton in the lurch; the debt was £100. So he was arrested and put in Ludgate Gaol for this money. He lay there a whole year, and died there. But he gave a very good testimony of his faith in the true God, and in this Commission of the Spirit, and of that full assurance of eternal happiness he should enjoy to eternity."‡

* Sir Walter Scott had seen this *Lost Sheep*, which the present writer has not yet found. He treats it, however, as the production of a Familist; evidently confusing the Muggletonians with the Grindletonians, an earlier sect. See Note E. to Woodstock.

† Muggleton spoke of Claxton as a Gehazi, and attributes his change of tone in part to his having "consulted with that venomous serpent," his wife, Frances, who seems never to have shared her husband's belief in the Witnesses, and had been sentenced by John Reeve. Muggleton bade the believers in Maidstone allow Claxton "no more maintenance weekly, as you have done formerly;" still he continued to recommend his earlier writings, and furnished them to believers as late as 1684.

‡ *Acts of the Witnesses, ut supra*, p. 82.

Matters went on pretty smoothly with our Prophet for about ten years after Claxton's recantation. He wrote books, disputed with all comers, paid visits to his friends in various parts of the country. Among other places, he visited Nottingham in 1663, at the expense of a "Society of Behmenists, mixed with Quakers," who invited him thither at the instance of his friend Ellen Sudbury, wife of Richard Sudbury, an ironmonger of Nottingham. It was on one of his journeys that he got into difficulties at Chesterfield, where his valued friend and correspondent, Mrs. Dorothy Carter, a widow, and the aunt of Ellen Sudbury, kept a small school. He was apprehended and committed to Derby Gaol, at the instance of the Rev. John Coope, the vicar of Chesterfield, on the old charge of denying the Holy Trinity. The horse on which he rode was also seized on behalf of the Lord of the Manor, and he was more troubled for the horse than for himself, "because his friend, John Brunt, was surety for the horse, else pay four pounds." The Earl of Newcastle, however, who was Lord of the Manor, on hearing of the circumstances, "was angry," and said, "Will you take away a man's horse before he be convicted and condemned? I charge you," said he, "that the horse be put to grass, and let the owner pay for his meat." Coope, the prosecutor, was surprised at the sense and courage which Muggleton displayed on examination; and said to the aldermen, when the prisoner was removed, "that this man was the soberest, wisest man of a fanatic that ever he talked with;" he had fancied him a sort of Quaker. However, Muggleton lay in Derby Gaol nine days, and then was released on bail to meet his trial at the next assizes. Probably then the prosecution was allowed to drop, for he complains of nothing except the nine days' imprisonment and the fees of the prison, and the grief which his detention caused to his newly married wife.

This imprisonment in Derby Gaol is worth noting, inas-

much as it was the occasion of an interview between Lodowicke Muggleton and that same Gervase Bennet (or Benet) whose sarcasm gave rise to the fixing of the name "Quakers" upon the "Society of Friends of Truth," or followers of George Fox. It does not appear that we have any other account of Judge Bennet which gives any insight into the character of the man. Muggleton describes him as "more atheistical" than his brother magistrates, "being of the Sadducee spirit," and says that on his wisdom and knowledge they all depended. He speaks of him too as "a moderate man, who asked his questions moderately." For four hours they talked together on points of theology. They had agreed to refer the topics of their discussion to the arbitrament of Holy Scripture, in the handling of which Muggleton showed his wonted shrewdness. Bennet was nonplused, to the great delight of the magistrates, the sheriff's men, and the jailor, who were present at the interview, and rejoiced in the defeat of one who had so often vanquished them in argument. They could not restrain their glee, but frequently interrupted the colloquy. "Mr. Bennet, we think you have met with one that is too hard for you now!" "Now, Mr. Bennet, you have met with your match!" Bennet showed great good humour in the disputation; he evidently was very much taken with his stout opponent, and acknowledged that he approved of what Muggleton had spoken better than of anything that ever he heard in his life, and could not gainsay it; but said, moreover, he could not venture his salvation on any man's words. On one point they were agreed, to begin with. Bennet had "been a long time of the opinion that the soul of man is mortal, and doth die."* This picture of the man, candid, materialistic, literal, fond of disputation, and of all things abhorring fanaticism, answers exactly to the character

* *Acts of the Witnesses, ut supra*, pp. 93-102.

which Fox's *Journal* leads us to form of him, and supplies an interesting historical confirmation of its truth.

Earlier in the same year in which he suffered imprisonment at Derby, Muggleton had married for the third time. His wife, Mary Martin, was the daughter of John Martin, a tanner, at East Malling, in Kent. "I had been," says he, "a widower sixteen years before I took this maid to wife; she was twenty-five years of age when I married her, and I was about fifty-three years old when I took her to wife. She was of a good, meek, innocent and just nature, besides the strong faith and zeal she had in this Commission of the Spirit; so that she was very suitable, both in spiritual and temporal qualifications, unto my nature."* Indeed this last marriage of his seems to have been a very happy one. His wife brought him a little property, and devoted herself to his interests till the day of his death; often by her quickness of wit standing between him and danger; and tending his latter years with the most patient care. She survived him twenty years.

Derby Gaol was not the last prison into which Muggleton found his way. His books were seized in London in 1670; but he escaped the malice of his persecutors, and remained in hiding for a time. Nor would he have appeared again, probably, in a court of law, had not the death, in 1675, of a well-to-do friend of his, Deborah Brunt, widow of John Brunt (one of the first believers, and a good friend to the Witnesses during their imprisonment in 1653), left him in the position of her executor. He brought an action of trespass against Sir John James, in respect of some house property, formerly belonging to Mrs. Brunt, in the Postern,

* *Ibid.*, p. 86. The marriage took place in 1663, at some time previous to 14th Nov. 1663. (See Letter to Dorothy Carter, of that date.) It was solemnised "according to the law of England." It is presumed that it did not take place at Church, as no entry of it is to be heard of in any likely Parish Register.

London Wall. This led to a lawsuit, in the course of which he was obliged to make his appearance in the Spiritual Court, only to be once more apprehended on the charge of blasphemy.

This was at the lowest ebb of his fortunes. For, during his enforced absence from home, certain of his followers had revolted ; and, under four notable ringleaders (a scrivener, a flaxman, a brewer, and—what Muggleton hated of all things—a Scotchman), had declared that Nine Assertions made by the prophet, which they specified in writing, were contrary both to common sense and to the principles of John Reeve. The Assertions are certainly strong enough ; however, Muggleton defended them through thick and thin. As to common sense, what was that but reason ; and reason was the Devil. And as to John Reeve, why faith in a living prophet's word was surely better than quotation of a dead one's writing.

It showed the power of the man's character that, although circumstances forbade him to meet the rebels openly, yet his denunciation of them by letter was enough to put an end to the division. The four leaders were expelled ; one only of them being allowed afterwards to return to the fold. As for the Scotchman, Walter Buchanan, he received his sentence of damnation, expressed in language which was sufficiently warm. "You have showed yourself a right Scotchman, a dissembeling, false-hearted man, of the Scottish nature. And it would be a rare thing to meet with a true-hearted Scotchman or woman, that is upright in heart either to God or man ; for I have been in this Commission almost twenty years, and I never knew but two, a Scotchman and a Scotchwoman, that made a profession of this faith ; and they both proved false-hearted both to God and man."*

However, the internal conflict among his followers must

* *Stream from the Tree of Life, ut supra*, p. 10.

have added greatly to the bitterness of a persecution, which in itself was sufficiently severe. After long delay, Muggleton was tried, before judges Atkins and Rainsford, at the Old Bailey, on Wednesday, the 17th January, 1677. Sir Robert Atkins was lenient to him on the trial; but Sir Richard Rainsford, Chief Justice of the King's Bench (who had recently succeeded Sir Matthew Hale), pelted him with gross abuse from the bench; and when it is added that sentence was given by the notorious George Jefferies, then Recorder of London, it may be presumed that it did not err on the side of leniency.

The trial can hardly be termed a fair one. The evidence against him was indeed derived from his own books, which had been seized at his house by the wardens of the Stationers' Company.* Still there was some difficulty in shaping the case so as to procure a verdict against him; because anything not published within the last three years came within the Act of Indemnity of 1674; and Muggleton had sent nothing to the press since 1669. Unfortunately, however, to evade the difficulty of publishing a heretical book in England, he had formerly allowed one of his books against the Quakers to appear with the imprint "Amsterdam, printed in the year of our Lord God 1668, and are to be had in Great Trinity Lane, over against the Lyon and the Lamb." The "Amsterdam" was palpably a ruse;† might not the volume

* Some of the actual books seized are still extant. One is in the Lambeth Library, and bears on the back of the title the inscription, "Aug: 30th, 1676. Seized att Muggleton's house in the Posterne by Samuel Marne & Richard Clarke, Wardens." Another is in St. Paul's Library, and has on the fly leaf the words "30th August, 1676. Seized at Lodowick Muggleton's house by Samll. Mearne & Richard Clark, Wardens." This copy belonged to Bishop Compton, and was presented to St. Paul's Library, with the rest of the Bishop's benefaction, in July, 1715.

† It was not an uncommon evasion. For instance, the first edition of Richard Overton's *Man's Mortalitie* bears the imprint, "Amsterdam, Printed by John Canne, Anno Dom. 1644."

have also been antedated, so as to put it under the protection of the Act? This was the argument adopted by his prosecutors, and it was successful. The indictment set forth that "he, the said Lodowicke Muggleton, on the 30th of August, in the 23rd year of His Majesty's reign, in St. Giles' Parish without Cripplegate, London, by force and arms, did unlawfully, wickedly, maliciously, scandalously, blasphemously, seditiously, schismatically, and heretically, write, print, and sell, utter and publish, a certain malicious, scandalous, blasphemous, seditious, and heretical book, entitled *The Neck of the Quakers Broken*." Being found guilty, he was condemned to pay a fine of £500, and to stand upon the pillory in three of the most eminent places of the city, the Exchange, Temple Bar, and Smithfield, on three several days; his books to be burned with fire before his face. The pillory he accordingly suffered, and was much knocked about in it, "his grey hairs gilded with dirt and rotten eggs," according to a contemporary account. The fine he could not pay, and was accordingly sent to prison; but having remained there six months, he was released after paying £100, and finding two sureties for his good behaviour during life, on the 19th July, 1677; a day of joy to his people, and a red letter day in their calendar.

If any one were anxious to vindicate the salutary effect of persecution, as a means of keeping obstinate people in order, he might fairly refer us to the case of Lodowicke Muggleton, as an instance in point. There can be no doubt that the Last Witness was cowed by his appearance in the pillory. He was an old man, or at least not a young one, being sixty-eight years of age, and though he survived his rough usage twenty years, it deserves remark that he never again ventured, at all events in writing, to pass the merciless sentence of damnation upon an opponent. Certainly this is a very significant fact. He had learned a lesson. No more for

him of "the modest punishment of a wooden ruff." He was not willing to expose himself again to the jeers and violence of the mob. They had spilled his blood, and it would cry out in vengeance against them, he said; but for all that, he took care not to come in the way of the authorities again. With this event therefore his public life ends; henceforth we know him only in his correspondence, which forms a large collection. He wrote his autobiography for posthumous publication, bringing it up to the date of his release from prison; and nothing shows more plainly how the degradation of his cruel punishment had eaten into his soul, than the awful denunciations against judges, jury, wardens, lawyers,—in short, against all who had taken part in his prosecution,—which fill the later pages of his autobiography. The terrible vehemence 'and deep searching thirst for vengeance' of his complaint and supplication to God against his enemies is so real and vivid as to make one shudder.

It would appear that he lived hereafter a quiet easy life; dispensing his blessings to his followers; joining in their social meetings; twice a-year commemorating the two great events of the giving of the Commission to John Reeve in February 1652, and his own release from custody, in July 1677; looked up to as an unerring oracle in things spiritual, an excellent guide and adviser in things temporal too. In his later letters, a large space is taken up with counsel and suggestion on matters of this material kind. It is difficult to resist the temptation of extracting one of these, unique in its kind, which, as a study of character, is simply delicious.

A Copy of a Letter written by the Prophet Lodowicke Muggleton to the Widow Mrs. Elizabeth Marsden, [formerly Elizabeth Smith, and servant to Dorothy Carter,] of Chesterfield, bearing date from London, April 18th, 1685.

"Dear friend in the true faith, Elizabeth Marsden.

Having an opportunity at this time to inform you, that there is a design in agitation that will be for your good, (and your children's

good also, as long as your natural life in this world, if you please to accept of it,) I thought it convenient and necessary to give you timely notice of it, that you may not be surprised, but may have time to consider of it. The business is this; there is a friend of ours that is a widower, that is of this faith, that is a shopkeeper and of a genteel trade, (namely, a salesman and a tailor both, that selleth all new apparel,) and he hearing that you are a shopkeeper (though of another trade) and of this faith, and of a good natural temper, doth conceive you would make a good wife to live here at London, if you shall think good.

The man's name is John Croxen; he liveth at the corner house at Houndsditch; it is the best house for trade in all the street, being a corner house. His trade doth bring in at least two or three hundred pounds a year. And as for his person, I suppose you will not dislike it; and for his age it is very suitable unto yours, he is about four or five and forty years old is the most, (and I suppose you are seven or eight and thirty years old, which is very suitable.) And this is one of this faith we own, and we know him to be as good a natured man to a wife as any I know in the world. I know you may live in as much splendour and credit as any merchant's wife in London doth, if you have him to your husband. You shall have a maid servant, and men servants to be at your command. My wife's brother's son is apprentice with him, and hath served now, at Midsummer, five years of his time; which if I had not known him to be a good natured man, (and a good trade,) he should never have been put apprentice to him.

All the rich believers here in London do very well approve of his having of you to wife, and of your having of him to your hasband; and would be glad to have you live at London; that you may be numbered among the rich in this world—as well as being numbered with the rich in faith, rich in the world to come, as I know you will. Besides I cannot conceive how you can raise yourself, or prefer yourself or your two children, if you should match with any man there in the country. Though it were with a man of a hundred a year, yet your person will be made a mere drudge, and your children mere slaves. Neither is there any of this faith there in that country (as I know of) that is worth any thing considerable; and for you to match with one that is contrary, it will cause shipwreck to be made of the peace of your mind, which is of more value than the whole world.

Now I shall tell you how the state of this man's condition is; that if you cannot bear with it you shall have your liberty to choose or refuse,

and save him a journey. This John Croxen hath had two wives, and hath at this time five children, all alive. Two by the first wife, before I knew him; and those two are both out of the way—the daughter getteth her living, being a good needle-woman, or at service; or might be married, but her father doth not like the man that she would have, because he hath no trade, (for a trade is the surest thing to get bread in this England, if a man be a good husband;) the other is a boy that is apprentice to a silk weaver, which hath served great part of his time, so that he will be no trouble nor charge to his father nor his wife. And by this last wife he hath three daughters; the eldest is (I think) a matter of twelve or thirteen years old, and she is put apprentice to a friend of ours for five years, to be a shop-keeper. So that there are but two young daughters that are at home with him; the one of them is about eight years old, and the other (I think) about four years old. These two must be at home—yet no great trouble to his wife, because the maid can make them ready and send them to school. For if you should be his wife you would do more good ten times, in locking to the shop and selling of garments, and to know the prices, and learn the trade; that in case he should die before you, you may drive the trade yourself. Thus I have given you an account of the whole matter.

Now he and William Chaire, a batchelor, do intend after Whitsuntide to make a journey into those parts, to see you and other friends in Staffordshire. Mr. Croxen cometh only to you, upon that account as to make you his wife, if you like the man when you see him. And William Chaire he cometh on purpose to Elizabeth Burton, to make her his wife if she will accept of him: he had a great love for her when she was here in London.

But now, dear friend, the case is thus; you must send me word whether you are resolved to keep yourself a widow always, or whether you are resolved to live there where you are always, or whether you are minded to change your condition you are now in, or whether you will suffer him to come to see you. And if you do not like him when you have seen him, you shall have liberty in your mind to refuse him; for I would not persuade you to anything against your own mind, nor advise you to anything that were not for your good. Therefore I would desire you to send your answer unto me as soon as you can conveniently (and as short as you can) to these particulars, in the latter part of this letter. Likewise, I desire you not to let any of our friends in those parts see this letter, neither would I have you to mention it to any one, till after you have given me your answer. And if you do

incline in your mind to hearken to the conditions contained in this letter, then keep it to yourself, and let none know of it; until Mr. Croxen and William Chaire doth come to see you and the rest of our friends, which will be after Whitsuntide. So, with my love and my wife's love remembered unto yourself, I take leave, and remain

Your friend in the true faith,

LODOWICKE MUGGLETON.

*London, the 18th day
of April, 1685.*

Direct your letter unto me, thus, For Mr. Delamain, upon Bread Street Hill, at the sign of the "Three Tobacco Pipes," in London.*

This curious letter affords no bad index of Muggleton's character on its practical side. He combined with his large and dogmatic claim to a specialty of religious teaching considerable acuteness and experience in the management of affairs. In his own calling he was industrious, and apparently successful, until his peculiar religious position began to interfere with his temporal advancement; but neither before nor after that period, though acutely sensible of the advantage of means and position, did he shew on his own behalf any greed of gain. Very early in life he relinquished the fair opportunity of a prosperous marriage, because his conscience would not allow him to sanction the making of money by usury; some years later he lost "a great stroke of work" at his trade, because he could no longer follow the Puritans in church fellowship; he prides himself on his independence, asserts that while he had "spent many a pound for the Commission's sake," he "did not live of the Gospel, as the Apostles did, without working," and claiming to be "more true in that particular than ever any Apostle was, or ever any Quaker was."† When he gave up business he could fearlessly affirm: "I owe the world nothing; I never wronged any in the

* *Supplement, ut supra*, pp. 44—47.

† *Spiritual Epistles*, 2nd Edition, 1820, p. 113.

world the value of sixpence in my life, to my knowledge.”* His calling was one against which jokes have been directed, ever since mankind first profited by the productions of its skill, yet he continued to take an honest pride in it. “What were the prophets of old, many of them, but herdsmen? and the apostles but fishermen? Very mean employments; yet God hath honoured them with great honour, and hath made poor men kings, prophets, and apostles. And why should it seem strange to the world, that God should choose two tailors . . . to be His two last Prophets and Witnesses of the Spirit in this last age of the world? A tailor is more honourable with kings, and princes, and noblemen of this world than herdsmen and fishermen.”†

He was proud, too, of the old Northamptonshire stock from which he came, and of the great London in which he was born. With a pardonable feeling of the John Bull kind, he describes himself as “a free-born Englishman, and a freeman of London by birth, and never was out of England in all my life.” A great dread of the perils of the ocean not only forbade him “to concern himself with any ship or sea affairs, if it were ever so much for his profit,” but kept him from ever quitting English ground. “I have,” he writes to a friend in Ireland, “such an antipathy in my nature, that if I might have ten thousand pounds I would not come through that sea gulf to see you; though I have travelled several thousand miles in England in my time by land.”‡ Indeed he can find no simile strong enough to realise his imagination of the horrors of the sea passage, than that great gulf which cut off communication between Dives in hell (Ireland) and Lazarus in heaven. His amusing hatred of England’s

† *Spiritual Epistles*, *ut supra*, p. 440.

* *Ibid.*, p. 474.

‡ *Supplement*, *ut supra*, p. 54.

ancient northern foe has already been referred to.* Of foreign nations or of foreign affairs he never seems, judging from his letters, to have taken much notice. When one of his friends thought to better his fortunes by emigration to Virginia, "I wonder," wrote he, "what is in men's minds, to run amongst the heathens who are without God in the world. My nature is so contrary to go out of the land of Canaan, of England, amongst the heathen, that I had rather live in prison here all days of my life."† Nay, even of home politics he seems to have been quite unconscious, except when the legal enactments of his time pressed indirectly upon him or his followers. He lived through the most exciting period of English history; he honoured and revered Oliver Cromwell as a true "Lion of the tribe of Judah"; yet his correspondence, so far as it is preserved, contains not a single allusion to the restoration of the monarchy, nor does it even speak of events which must certainly have touched him nearly, the Great Plague and Fire of London. Public matters had no interest for him; he was equally happy under a monarchy, a commonwealth, or a dictatorship. He only asked to be let alone. Yet though in this respect he was one of the quietest and most easily governed of subjects, he was by no means the man to sit down tamely under oppression. Every constitutional means that could be taken for the maintenance of his own liberties he would take; and he had somehow possessed himself of a very accurate knowledge of the limits and the requirements of the law. His constant endeavour on his own part, and his constant recommendation to his followers, was never to come into conflict with the law of the land, or give spiritual enemies a legal handle against

* The prejudice extended to his followers, and was not overcome till the time of John Peat, a Scotchman by birth, and a leading Muggletonian, between 1750 and 1774.

† *Spiritual Epistles, ut supra*, p. 405.

them. He never would have them resist the arm of the law, but besought them to pay the stipulated fine at once, when brought into trouble through refusing to take the oath of allegiance or to attend at church. "It is only a money business." "It is better to give them their fess now while it is but little, so you can keep the mind free from oaths and worship." "It is better to part with silver than to part with peace of conscience."* Such was his sound advice, and such, it may be added, was his own constant practice. He paid fines repeatedly, because, having been chosen to serve on various parish offices, such as scavenger, questman, or constable, he refused to qualify for them by taking the oath of allegiance.

The refusal to take an oath was a common scruple with tender consciences at that day; and along with it generally went the belief that it was unlawful to make war, or to bear arms. Muggleton was not so rigid and absolute in his objection to the former as the Society of Friends have always been. Where an oath was a mere legal form and order in a court of justice, he permitted it to be taken. The only oaths utterly forbidden to him were "swearing to unrighteous things," and swearing vainly in common discourse.† He made but one exception, however, to the unlawfulness of war, and it is a characteristic one. He allowed a disciple of his, Thomas Nosworthy, a settler in Antigua, to bear arms "for the defence and preservation of the temporal life, and the estates of the people, against the heathen, and any other enemies that seek to invade that island." The case was different "in those strange islands, amongst the heathen," to what it was "here in England, Ireland, and Scotland, who profess all one faith; though very few have true faith. . . . Therefore, as the old proverb saith, 'If you will live at Rome, you must do

* *Spiritual Epistles ut supra*, pp. 112, 107, 181.

† *Ibid.*, p. 59.—He was opposed to capital punishment, even for murder. *Div. Looking-glass*, chap. xiv.

as Rome doth.'"^{*} Here we see something of his contempt, not only for aliens, but also for those who left their native land for the chances of success on foreign soil.

The profession of a soldier was not the only one which Muggleton regarded as unlawful. He condemns each one of the three learned professions, not sparing any. When he was consulted on the choice of a profession by a young disciple, John Cowlye, who had received his education at the University of Cambridge, Muggleton "convinced him of the unlawfulness of all three, for any saint or God's elect to undertake." We should hardly expect him, considering what was his religious position, to have a good word for the clerical vocation. He pronounces their ministry all false, "from the first Pope to the last Quaker," even one as well as the other. "As for the doctors of physick, they are the greatest cheats, upon a natural account, that are in the world. They cheat people of their money and of their health; and it would be good if there were never a doctor of physick in the world; people would live longer, and live better in health. For God never appointed any doctor of physick, but he appointed nature to preserve nature." "And as for the lawyers, they keep the keys of the knowledge of the law, and will neither enter into truth and honesty themselves, nor suffer others to enter in that would." Hardly is there a man to be found but is "deceived either by the physician, lawyer, or priest. Nay they deceive one another, for the priest is deceived by the doctor of physick, and the doctor of physick is deceived by the priest And as for the lawyer, he cheats the doctor and the priest both and they do the like by him so that they get pretty even one with another. But all people besides, that deal with them, are sure to be deceived and to lose by them." After such an exposition as this (which is

^{*} *Spiritual Epistles, ut supra*, p. 469.

much fuller and more fearful in the original account, where it goes into questions of the world to come), we need not wonder that "when the young man heard these things, he left all preferment that way, for truth's sake, and became a steadfast and true believer; and he, being a scholar, was mighty able to oppose the learned."*

Among the scruples which Muggleton derived from his puritan training was an abhorrence of card-playing, which he classed with drunkenness,† and other vices of a reprobate life. Yet he was not averse to amusement on its own account, or to the enjoyment of life in a sober and chaste way. Against the vice of uncleanness he was especially severe, and in his own person he seems to have been, not simply strict in outward conduct, but pure of mind. True, his language is plain enough, and now and then runs into coarseness, especially in invective; when provoked, as he admits, he could sometimes speak "unsavoury" words. He was a puritan in the severity with which he reprobated whatever approached to vice or to injustice. In his sober common sense view of things, and in his genuine love of toleration and hatred of all kinds of religious persecution, he was something more than a puritan. "I always loved the persecuted better than I did the persecutor," he writes to George Fox; "and I always had compassion upon the afflicted for conscience-sake, though I knew they suffered for a mere lie, as all you Quakers do. Yet I say, whoever doth persecute you for conscience in meeting and worshipping an unknown God (as you Quakers do), I say those men that do persecute you willingly, will be every man of them damned to eternity."‡

From some of the prevalent superstitions and delusions

* *Acts of the Witnesses*, ut supra, pp. 112, 114. *Whole Book of Revelation*, ut supra, pp. 239, 244.

† *Acts of the Witnesses*, ut supra, p. 125.

‡ *Letter to George Fox*, 2nd Edition, 1756, p. 88.

of his age he was singularly free. Witchcraft was still, in his time, widely believed in and feared. He treated it as a sinful surrender on the part of witches and possessed persons to the power of their own disordered imaginations; and wrote a treatise (which he himself valued very highly), called the *Witch of Endor*, expressly to apply this explanation to the Scriptural accounts of witchcraft. He laughs at the popular notion that witches have power over "infants, which are not capable of fear; for fear and belief are the inlet to all witchcraft."* In like manner he interpreted the phenomena of demoniacal possession as evidence only of disease. Distracted men, madmen, or fools are "possessed with devils, that is, with distempers of nature. These are devils that are produced through accidents of nature; some extraordinary grief, fright, or loss hath broke the brain, and so the seat of reason is quite out of order."† In harmony with this rationalistic explanation Muggleton seems inclined, not only to spiritualise certain of the miracles of our Lord, but even to regard the spiritual meaning as the only legitimate sense of some of them; *e. g.*, of the casting of the demons into the bodies of swine.‡ His strong disinclination to the ready acceptance of mere marvels is aptly shown in a postscript to a letter, bearing date 19th June, 1669, and addressed to his friend Thomas Tomkinson, which to us, who have lately been favoured with the story of the Welsh fasting girl, will not be without interest. "I would desire," he writes, "when you send to me or Mr. Delamaine, if it be not too much trouble, [that you would tell me] whether that maid that fasted a whole year, as was reported, be alive yet, or no; because I heard at Chesterfield for certain that she was yet alive, and that it was a mere cheat to get money."§

* *Spiritual Epistles, ut supra*, p. 412.

† *Letter to George Fox, ut supra*, p. 65.

‡ *Stream from the Tree of Life*, Edition of 1758, p. 59.

§ *Spiritual Epistles, ut supra*, p. 291.

Lodowicke Muggleton's end was a peaceful close to a long and, in some respects, an arduous life. The old man's latter days, spent amid the reverence of his followers, and watched over by the faithful affection of his wife, must have been happy. "Upon the first day of March 169 $\frac{7}{8}$, the prophet was taken with an illness and weakness; upon which he said these words, 'Now hath God sent death unto me'; and presently after was helped to bed. And though he kept his bed, yet we could not perceive that he was sick, only weak; and he lay as if he slept; but in such quietness as if he was nothing concerned with either pain or sickness. So that it was mere age that took him away. The fourteenth day of March he departed this life, with as much peace and quietness as ever any man did, being about eighty-eight years of age; so that he had that blessing to come to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in at his season. Upon the sixteenth day his corpse was removed to Lorimer's Hall [close to his house in the Postern, where he died], and on the seventeenth day was from thence attended on with two hundred and forty-eight friends, with six of us appointed to carry the pall, each with gloves and hatbands, accompanying him to Bethlehem Churchyard: where he was buried by [beside] his fellow Witness, which was according to his own appointment."* The rhyming inscription on his tomb was quoted in a former paper. A copy of verses, entitled *An Elegy on the Death of Mr. Lodowicke Muggleton*, appeared shortly after his decease, and, though not written by a disciple, was printed as a broad-sheet at the request of his followers, in 1698, and has by them been at least twice reprinted, in 1754 and 1831.

In the portrait of Muggleton we may easily discern the traces of that combination of integrity, shrewdness, and

* *Acts of the Witnesses*, first Edition, 1699, end of Epistle Dedicatory by Thomas Tomkinson.

determination, which formed his somewhat remarkable career. There exist three original likenesses of him. Of these the best executed is an oval oil painting of the head and bust, looking to the right, at present hanging in the Bird Gallery at the British Museum. It was presented anonymously to the Trustees of that institution, through Dr. Maty, the then Librarian, on the 26th October 1758. There is a memorandum in pencil accompanying the Report on the subject of the presentation, "aged 66, 1674." Another most interesting painting, is a full length (also looking to the right), by Muggleton's friend, William Wood, of Braintree, now in the possession of the Muggletonian body. It was formerly in the hands of Mr. Tweene at Ware, at whose death it was purchased by the late Mr. Isaac Frost. Of more value than either of these, perhaps, is the cast of the prophet's features taken after death. This also is in the possession of the Muggletonian body. Copies have been taken from it at different times; on the last occasion (early in the present year) the original was unfortunately broken, yet not so as to injure the face; it has been carefully put together again, but has not been improved by a new coat of thin black paint. It had been painted black at a former period. From this cast a small copperplate engraving was executed at an early date. It bears the engraver's name, G. V. Caffee, but has no date. The plate is in the possession of the Muggletonian body; it is poorly engraved and nearly worn out; early copies of it are rare, as it seems to have been much in request among the believers. A small oil painting was made from it in May 1813, by Richard Pickersgill, himself a Muggletonian; of this several copies are in existence, one of them being preserved by the Muggletonian body. In 1829, at the expense of Joseph and Isaac Frost, a half length engraving was executed by J. Kennerley, from the full length portrait. This is usually found prefixed to the Divine Song-book, and is to

be had separately. It does the original from which it is taken no sort of justice, and introduces accessories, allegorical and otherwise, which are peculiar to itself. This engraving has been photographed in carte-de-visite size. Muggleton's personal appearance furnished matter for jest to his and George Fox's opponent, Charles Leslie, who compares the two men in respect of their "long straight hair, like rat's tails;" and adds, "it hath been observed of great enthusiasts that their hair is generally slank, without any curl; which proceeds from a moisture of brain that inclines to folly. It was thus with Fox and Muggleton."* An early and good copy of Caffee's engraving, prefixed to the copy of the first edition of the *Acts of the Witnesses*, in the Lambeth Library, has written below it these words, in a contemporary hand: "He had yellow hair and a ruddie cōplexion."

It is time to speak of some of the prominent followers of Muggleton. The "eldest son of the Commission of the Spirit", as he has been called, was JOHN SADDINGTON, a Leicestershire man, from Arnesby, who seems to have been afterwards engaged in business in London in the sugar trade. He was a fine handsome fellow, and is addressed, in a copy of contemporary verses, as "John Saddington the tall." He it was who, at the time of the rebellion against the Nine Assertions, did most to secure the attachment of the wavering believers to their absent chief. He is the author of two works in print, and of three or four which remain in manuscript.

But though not the "eldest son," yet certainly the chief advocate of the Commission was THOMAS TOMKINSON, of Sladehouse. This staunch defender of an unpopular faith came of an old family of Staffordshire yeomen, who for generations had held the farm of Sladehouse,† in the parish of Ilam,

* *Leslie's Theological Works*, 1721, vol. ii. p. 357.

† This Sladehouse was the scene of the murder of Joseph Mycock by his younger

not far from Dovedale. About Easter of 1869, the present writer made a pilgrimage to the locality, and examined the registers of Ilam and Blore-Ray, in search of traces of the family. There are plenty of such traces to be found, but, owing to the extreme frequency with which the christian names Thomas and Ann occur in various branches of the Tomkinson family, it is very difficult to extricate the lines of descent. Their pedigree goes up to a William Tomkinson, who died in 1559. Several members of the family appear to have been, for their station, men of some culture. There is a curious tablet in Blore church to the memory of Thomas Tomkinson, who died in 1640, respecting whom the local tradition is that he was a great scholar. Another ancient member of the family, a former tenant of Town End Farm, in Swinscoe, is celebrated as having been a man of huge stature; a qualification of which the rural mind was probably a better judge than of scholastic attainment.

Our Thomas Tomkinson, born in 1631, the son of Richard and Ann Tomkinson, of Sladehouse, was a great reader from his youth, and his favourite subject was church history. He had himself "procured a library of Presbyterian books,"* and from his landlord, the Earl of Ardglass, at Throwley Hall, he "borrowed St. Augustine's *City of God*, and Dr. Hammond's Works." His mother "a zealous Puritan," was "a virtuous good woman, and greatly charitable." His father seems to have been but an incompetent person: at his wife's death, he made over his affairs to his son, and boarded with him as a lodger. Tomkinson heard nothing of the Commission of the Spirit till he was thirty years old,

brother Benjamin Mycock, on the 10th February, 1812. They were sons of a labourer at Grindon, and the elder brother, who was forty or fifty years of age, had married his former employer, Mrs. Sarah Maulton, of Sladehouse.

* *Truth's Triumph*, pub. 1823, p. 258.

when he came across one of Claxton's books, the very title of which not only startled him, but more than half convinced him that there was truth in it. A year later he arrived in London, on May-day, 1662, expressly "to see and discourse with the surviving Prophet." He found him in Great Trinity Lane, at work at his trade, and enjoyed some conversation with him. At this time he was on the eve of matrimony, and on his return home he united himself to "a good virtuous maid." This step threw him back somewhat in his allegiance to Muggleton. His father was a decided enemy to the faith; his wife did not favour it, though she was, he says, "pretty moderate. So, to please an old father and a young wife, I went to church by fits." A man of his intelligence, however, soon made other converts, and a community of Muggletonians, over twenty in number, sprang up in the north-eastern corner of Staffordshire. They met occasionally at each others' houses, but still went sometimes to church. A quarrel in 1674, with the parson of his parish seems to have precipitated Tomkinson's hostility to the Establishment; and henceforth he went no more to church. In consequence of this he was vexed with writ after writ, accused of popery, and injured in his farm business. His great enemy was one Archdeacon Brown; while his great friend was a certain Archdeacon Cook, who had overheard him zealously contend with a Quaker, at the Dog Inn, in Lichfield, on behalf of the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ's body. He was excommunicated by his parson; but, through Archdeacon Cook's interest, and the payment of a fine, he received absolution of this sentence. On this fact he thus moralises. "On the Sunday following, he [the parson] published my absolution and remission of my sins; and so I was taken into the Church as a dear brother, through a little money and friendship. . . . And truly I thought it was cheap enough to escape

their Hell and to gain their Heaven for twenty shillings charge.’”*

Some years after this he removed to London, and became one of the most zealous pillars of the Muggletonian community there. But few of his many written contributions to Muggletonian literature have found their way into print; one only, so far as I am aware, was published during his lifetime, *The Muggletonians Principles Prevailing*, by T. T. 1695, being an answer to Dr. John Williams' (anonymous) *True Representation of the Absurd and Mischievous Principles of the Sect commonly known by the name of Muggletonians*, 1694. Others of his numerous works were circulated in manuscript; and those which have been published are still much read and highly prized by his fellow believers. They are clearly and logically written, entertaining and powerful. Much cannot be said for their grammar or their orthography, which latter forms a system by itself. Nor is it possible to avoid noticing the singular and almost incredible blunders, which, however, were only the natural pitfalls in the literary path of a man who made himself a great reader, without the requisite education to correct and balance his reading. Nothing which it has ever been our good fortune to come across, in the way of literary blunders, can compare with the following remark of Tomkinson's upon Aristotle. He quotes as Aristotle's opinion, “that law that is most filled by reason must needs be most victorious and triumphant,” and then adds, “Howbeit, Aristotle was something dampled in his judgment by reading Julius Scallinger, who said that the beginning of reason was not reason; Aristotle, admiring of this sentence, said, Certainly there is something before and

* These facts are taken from a MS. narrative, entitled *The Christian Convert, or Christianity Revived*. . . . by that Christian Convert, Thomas Tomkinson, written in the year of our Lord God 1692. The copy above used seems to have been transcribed by Ardon Bonell, circa 1740.

better than reason, wherein reason itself had its rise.”* The picture of the old Greek perusing the sage criticisms of his modern commentator, and being “something damped in his judgment” thereby, until admiration ensued, is conceived in a truly delicious vein of exquisite anachronism.

Here it may be well to say something about the Muggletonian sacred books. They recognise, first of all, in common with all Christians, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. They exclude, however, the Apocrypha of the Old Testament from the canon, following here their puritan origin;† they exclude also the writings of Solomon, as being the utterances only of natural wisdom. “Solomon, indeed,” says John Reeve, “was a very wise man, but I never read that he was a holy or prophetic man; therefore it does not appear to me that that he was a penman of Holy Writ.”‡ In this way they get rid of the testimony of Ecclesiastes to the separate existence and destiny of the soul.

Second only to the received books of Scripture, the Muggletonians venerate that curious and ancient production called the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, an apocryphal work, older than Origen’s time, and probably dating from the second century; but which they, like Bishop Robert Grosseteste of Lincoln (1175—1253), who introduced it into this country, refer to and quote as inspired. Grosseteste first heard of the book from John de Basingstokes; he at once sent to Athens for it, and himself translated it from the Greek to the Latin. It was first printed in 1577, englished by A. G. (Arthur Golding), and has been very frequently reprinted down to the present time, often with woodcuts, as a

* *Truth’s Triumph*, *ut supra*, p. 178.

+ The same circumstance led to a preference for the “Old Translation,” or Geneva Bible, which was greatly strengthened by finding in it such renderings as “there is no man good but one, which is God,” and “their soul dieth,” &c.

‡ *Joyful News*, *ut supra*, p. 8.

sort of chap book. Dibdin describes it as "one of the most popular manuals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries." Whiston held it to be of canonical authority.* The first mention of it by a Muggletonian writer, is to be found in a manuscript letter by Thomas Tomkinson, in 1674.†

A similar place to that occupied by the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, among the standard authorities of the Muggletonians, has been allotted to the *Book of Enoch*, ever since its appearance in English in 1821. This apocryphal book was, up to the time of St. Augustine, much prized by the Christian Fathers. It passed out of sight, however (with the exception of a few Greek fragments in the *Chronographia* of Syncellus), until in 1773 some manuscripts of the Ethiopic version were brought to Europe by Bruce, the Abyssinian traveller. One of these was deposited in the Bodleian Library, and from it the English version of Dr. Laurence (afterwards Archbishop of Cashel) was made, and published at Oxford in 1821. Laurence also published the Ethiopic text in 1838; and another Ethiopic text was published at Leipsig in 1851, by Dr. A. Dillman. Two German translations have appeared since 1833, and the book continues to excite much interest and controversy among biblical and oriental scholars. It may occasion surprise that this book should so readily have been adopted as canonical by the Muggletonian body. It is even more remarkable, considering that no English version of any part of it existed in Muggleton's own time, that we should find the following passage in a letter of his in 1682. "The first man God chose, after the fall of Adam, was Enoch; and God did furnish him with revelation to write books. He left this revelation to

* *Notes and Queries*, second series, vol. vi., p. 3.

† It may be mentioned that there is now a very excellent and scholarly edition of the Greek text, with an introductory essay, attributing the origin of the work to the Nazarene body. See *The Testaments of the XII. Patriarchs: An attempt to estimate their Historic and Dogmatic Worth*. By Robert Sinkler, M.A., 1869.

Noah, and Noah left it to Shem, and Shem left it to his sons, until it came to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So that [this was] Enoch's revelation and declaration to the fathers of old; and all that did believe the books of Enoch, they were as a Parliament to enact it as a Statute-Law to their children from generation to generation for ever."* The late Mr. Isaac Frost was, it is believed, the means of introducing the book to his fellow Muggletonians; and he makes considerable use of it, in his painstaking and handsome work, *Two Systems of Astronomy* (1846), as confirming the Muggletonian, in opposition to the commonly received theory of the Universe.

Next in order come the writings of John Reeve and Lodowicke Muggleton, regarded, though not verbally inspired, as of equal or greater authority than Holy Scripture; at least so far as the enunciation of the Six Principles is concerned; because the "Commission of the Spirit hath deeper mysteries held forth in it than the other Commissions had."† Muggletonians speak commonly, therefore, not of Two Testaments, the Old and the New, but of Three; they enumerate Three Records; Three Commissions, each to be obeyed in its own time and place, and having force so long as God sustains it. The Commissions of the Water (that by Moses), and of the Blood (that by the Apostles), have made way for the Commission of the Spirit, which is thus at once the last and the highest. Any further development of revelation they believe to have been expressly excluded by the voice of God.

Muggletonians have no recognised formula of Creed. Adherence to the Six Principles is the sole criterion and requisite of membership to their Church. At different times,

* *Spiritual Epistles*, *ut supra*, p. 516, and again p. 587. Muggleton no doubt derived his impressions of the book from the references to it in the *Testament of the XII. Patriarchs*.

† *Stream from the Tree of Life*, *ut supra*, p. 32.

however, private believers have drawn up statements of their doctrinal belief. Thus in 1675, John Saddington elaborated XLVIII. *Articles of True Faith*, which were printed in 1830. In 1723, an anonymous believer drew up xxxvi. *Articles of the Third Record*; and in 1794, William Sedgwick (apparently in consequence of the Birchite Schism) prepared xvi. *Articles* to express the true Muggletonian belief. Neither of these two formularies have been printed. A printed paraphrase of the Apostles' Creed in the Muggletonian sense, with Scripture references, which is signed James Tennant, is sometimes found pasted on the fly leaf of Muggletonian books. The earliest copy of this is printed in black letter, but it bears no date, nor is anything known respecting its author. There is also a curious rhyming Creed of twenty-eight lines, in manuscript, perhaps a hundred years old, which seems from its condition to have been suspended from a wall, or otherwise publicly exhibited.

It will not do to forget, in this connection, the collection of *Divine Songs*, or *Songbook*, as it is familiarly called, which supplies to them the place of a collection of hymns, and indeed is the only approach to a devotional manual. For while prayer is by them eschewed, songs of gratitude and thanksgiving are deemed lawful, though by no means incumbent upon any believer who may think them savouring too much of the exploded idea of worship. Collections of these Songs were circulated in manuscript from the earliest days of the sect, many of them having been written by the immediate followers of Muggleton. A great number of these manuscript collections are still preserved by the body; several of them being in the autograph of the composers. The first mention of a printed Songbook in the records of the body, is on the 16th February, 1794; many entries of the sale of the volume are to be met with up to 14th August, 1796. No copy of this book has fallen in the present

writer's way ; it seems, from a letter of James Frost, 29th March, 1812, that it was not executed at the expense of the body, but "made a present of to the church by a printer." The church, however, compiled in 1829 the collection at present in use. It consists of two hundred and twenty-eight Songs, all by Muggletonian authors, and a good number of them expressly written for the collection. The largest contributor is Boyer Glover, a London watch-and-clockmaker, who may be deemed the poet of the Muggletonians. His name first occurs in their records in 1771. He contributes forty-nine Songs. James Miller (who wrote between 1730 and 1750), follows with twenty-seven. There are one or two by John Nicholls, a musician, who "played on the Lord Mayor's Day and in the waits," who died, old and helpless, about 1745, and through whom the only fragment that exists in John Reeve's autograph came into the possession of the body. The earliest Song-writers seem to be Thomas Turner, John Ladd, William Wood, Elizabeth Goodwin, and Elizabeth Henn. Thomas Tomkinson also tried his hand at verse composition.

It is not very difficult to estimate the extent to which the Muggletonian doctrines have met with success. Their influence has been confined almost entirely to the small body which professes them ; for their writings have seldom been published in the ordinary way ; they have never invited converts, and have found no opportunity, and looked for none, of bringing their opinions before the notice of the world. Neither Reeve nor Muggleton were preachers ; they disseminated their views in conversation and by letter : and this has ever been the habit of the body. Persons of influential position have rarely been attracted to their community, but the personal character of its members has always stood high ; few in numbers, they are and have been an industrious, and, in the main, a well-to-do and thriving set of people. Mug-

gleton's own times were the palmy days of the society, as respects the social standing of its members. He could point among his supporters to people of all classes, from Colonel Robert Phaire, the governor of Cork, to good, "sober, and conscientious" Mistress Dorothy Carter. Both of these had come to Muggleton from the Society of Friends, and from this body, as well as from their predecessors the Ranters and the Anabaptists, he received many, if not most, of the early adherents to his cause. In their case (as in Reeve's own), the change was a natural consequence of the exhaustion of their previous views, which threw them, by an inevitable reaction, into the opposite extreme.

In the absence of any express information, we must refer to such casual indications of the progress of the body as we may discover in their own writings, or in other places. Already, in 1654, two years after the revelation of John Reeve, some of their books had found their way to New England, when an order was made that every inhabitant who had in custody "any of the books of John Reeves and Lodowick Muggleton, 'who pretend to be the two last witnesses and prophets of Jesus Christ,' which books were said to be full of blasphemies, should bring or send them in to the next magistrate, within one month, on pain of ten pounds for each book remaining in any person's hands after that time."* By 1660, Muggleton himself testifies of his Commission, that "the sound of it hath gone through many parts of Christendom, as in this part of England, Scotland, Ireland, New England, Virginia, Barbadoes, and many other places I will not here mention. But the doctrine of the Commission of the Spirit hath been very little received in

* Hutchinson's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, 2nd edition, 1765, p. 196. Hutchinson evidently supposes them to have been Quakers. The books probably came from Bristol, where there were believers in 1654. *Sac. Rem.* p. 59.

the world; but the most that have received it are here in London, and in Cambridgeshire, and in Kent.”* In 1669, the Muggletonian views were thus introduced to the continent of Europe. “There is a great increase in the faith,” writes Muggleton, “here at London, and in some countries. There have been with me of late two or three German men, that were banished out of Germany for not submitting to the worship set up by that power. . . . The one of these is a doctor of physick, and another was a minister in Germany. The minister could not speak English as well as the doctor, but the doctor bought all the books, and hath written the Commission Book into the German language, and hath sent it among the Germans. So what the issue will be, time will bring forth; for there are many that would believe, did they but understand it in their own language.”† In spite of this it remained true that a prophet is without honour in his own house. “This thirty-three years that I have been in this Commission,” confesses Muggleton in 1685, “there hath not [been] one neighbour, or acquaintance, or kindred here in London (as I know of) that hath believed my report, save my own children.”‡

Still the Muggletonian views made way, and were handed down, from generation to generation, although obscurely. Out of London, the first society of believers appears to have been that which John Reeve visited in 1656, when he found some half score believers near Cambridge, poor men, “husbandmen and tradesmen, that labour for their bread.”§

We have seen already that, about the year 1664, there were over twenty believers in Staffordshire. In September, 1667, it was reported, in “an account of the number of the

* *Spiritual Epistles, ut supra*, p. 36.

† *Spiritual Epistles, ut supra*, p. 293.

‡ *Spiritual Epistles, ut supra*, p. 575.

§ *Supplement, ut supra*, p. 2.

conformists, nonconformists, &c.," that, "at Ashford [in Kent] and at other places, we find a new sort of heretics, after the name of Muggleton, a London tailor, in number thirty."* In the seventeenth edition of Edward Chamberlayne's *Angliae Notitia*, 1691, they are mentioned for the first time, and placed among the dwindling sects. In the eighteenth edition, 1694, we are told (p. 378), "the Muggletonians are scarce extant." The same words appear in succeeding editions till the twenty-first, in 1704, when all mention of this body is omitted. In William Maitland's *History of London*, 1739, there are enumerated (p. 517), among the places of worship (which, of course, is a mistake), two Muggletonian Meetings, one at Barnaby Street (south of St. Olave's, Southwark), and the other in Old Street Square (top of Aldersgate). This information is repeated in the Rev. John Entick's edition of Maitland, in 1756. A careful search of their records since 1770 would enable us to ascertain pretty accurately the names and numbers of the London Muggletonians from that time to this. There is a manuscript "Collection of the names of male friends residing in England, 14 August, 1803," which contains ninety-eight names, distributed over London, Kent, Hertfordshire, Norwich, Derbyshire, Bristol, Oxford, Walworth (and one in Ireland). The lists of subscribers' names prefixed to the *Interpretation of the Revelation*, 1808; to the *Volume of Spiritual Epistles*, 1820; to *Truths Triumph*, 1823; and to the *Songbook*, 1829, are useful in this connection.

In 1863, one of their body estimated their numbers as follows:—"There are, perhaps, two hundred and fifty, or three hundred, in London and its suburbs, a few in Kent, about sixty or eighty in Derbyshire, twelve or fifteen in Nottingham, and half a dozen in Mansfield; but as we believe

* *The Genuine Remains of Dr. Thomas Barlow, late Lord Bishop of Lincoln*, 1693, p. 313.

that public worship is not now acceptable to the Deity, of course we have no places in which to meet for worship, and no record of our numbers, so it is very possible that there may be Muggletonians in other districts with whom I have never communicated. For example, those in Derbyshire were ignorant of the existence of any persons entertaining the same faith in London, until one of their number removed thither to seek employment, and, after residing there a short time, heard of the London brethren by mere accident.”*

No regular and systematic records of their history have ever been kept by the Muggletonians. The manuscripts in the possession of their body, which do not seem to have been formally examined and collected before 1772, the time of the Birchite schism, and have not yet been catalogued, consist of I., a number of expository treatises, poems, songs, and other writings, illustrating the growth and character of their peculiar faith; II., a large collection of letters, some trivial enough, but many of them curious and interesting, extending, but in no connected series, from the origin of their community till the present day; III., a mass of bills and account books, beginning about 1770, and relating to the subscriptions for and sale of their printed books, and the expenses incurred at their social meetings. In 1804, the Community first became possessed of property, through the bequest of Catherine Peers, for the formation of a relief fund; and from that time to the present an exact account has been kept of its monetary affairs.

Among the manuscripts in Class I. are a few (including a transcript of great part of the *Commission Book*), in Muggleton's thick, tremulous, laboured hand-writing, which contrasts curiously with Reeve's fine, clear, minute penmanship. Thomas Tomkinson's stiff, upright, very

* Letter by William Ridsdale, *Inquirer*, 21st March, 1863.

legible characters (more like printing than writing), and his marvellous orthography, are largely represented in the collection. It seems almost a pity that the modern editors of the early Muggletonian literature should have felt themselves bound to adhere so rigidly as they have done to the grammar and punctuation, though not, except in case of proper names, to the spelling of the originals. The present writer has been obliged, in order to make his quotations intelligible to the general reader, to repunctuate freely, and now and then to smooth over a grammatical inequality, which impaired the sense as well as the elegance of the passage.*

There is no room here for an account of the numerous materials embraced in the letters which form Class II.; and in truth, to an outsider, an analysis of their contents would be exceedingly dry, at least where it was not exceedingly ludicrous. Appeals for help, addressed to the London Society, by or on behalf of poorer brethren in various parts of the country, were pretty frequent. One cannot but feel compassion for poor Edmond Feaver (whose tone had been high enough in his day of prosperity), when he writes from Kettering, 28th January, 1759, to John Austin Garrett, the chief person among the London believers, begging for charity with the touching plea, "I am Reduced to the Loest Degree my Coat, wastcoat and Britches are not all worth one shilling."

The various controversies which these letters reveal turn more or less on the original difference (already described) between Reeve and Muggleton as to the immediate notice of God. From an early time there seem to have been Reeveites, (or Reeveonians) in contradistinction to Muggletonians.

* It is not easy to hit the medium between an exact transcript for the curious eye, and too unsparing a revision. George Fox's *Journal*, for instance, has been greatly over-edited from the first. His autographs and his own publications are as uncouth, as those of Muggleton, or more so.

This may be what Muggleton means, when he speaks in 1663 about "those ~~that~~ disadhere unto John Reeve," most of whom however were then dead, and others fallen away from the steadfastness of faith.* Even the Rebellion against the Nine Assertions of Muggleton in 1671, partook in some degree of this party character. For, as Muggleton observes in his Answer, "it is the nature of Reason to believe dead prophets rather than living prophets. And it is the nature of Faith to believe live prophets rather than dead prophets."† A similar division of allegiance is hinted at in Thomas Tomkinson's Epistle Dedicatory to the Acts of the Witnesses, 1699, when he says, (p. vi.) "there can be no salvation to such as shall reject him or his writings, although they pretend to own John Reeve." It may be conjectured that the *Sacred Remains*, published in 1706, which consist exclusively of "treatises epistolary and public by the Lord's last immediate messenger, John Reeve," proceeded from this party.

There were some small internal controversies on other points, as in 1736, when Arden Bonell opposed a new doctrine of the Ascension of Beasts, or the resurrection of the lower animals. This curious discussion, together with some skirmishing on doctrinal points between Bonell and Phillip Lathorp, and again between Bonell and Joseph Horrell; and, a few years later, between John Meall and Edmond Feaver, constitutes nearly all our knowledge of Muggletonian history during the first half of the eighteenth century. No serious division occurred in the Muggletonian forces until that occasioned, about 1772, by the defection of the Birchites. William Crabb, of Braintree, speaks in July 1773 of a "misunderstanding in the Church," and this misunderstanding soon reveals itself as connected with the

* *Spiritual Epistles*, *ut supra*, p. 129.

† *Acts of the Witnesses*, *ut supra*, p. 150.

doctrine of immediate notice and the leadership of James Birch.

This JAMES BIRCH, a Welshman by birth, was a watch motion maker, living near Aldersgate, London. There exists a rhythmical account, from his own pen, of his conversion to Muggletonian views, which occupies fifteen rude stanzas, of eight lines each, and is dated the 5th December, 1771. In the same year his name heads the subscription list to a work of John Brown, of Norwich, on the *Devil's Downfall*. By the next year his opinions seem to have carried him out of harmony with his fellow-believers. He rejected their doctrine, that those who hold the true faith enjoy at once an absolute assurance of salvation, and held that this assurance was often withheld till the hour of death. He believed also, in opposition to Muggleton's teaching, that God does exercise an immediate oversight in human affairs, and affords an immediate inspiration, without which his former revelations are of no avail. He acquired a certain following, who did not, however, as yet formally separate from the original community. By degrees, however, he applied this doctrine of immediate notice in his own favour, and founded a small separatist community of which he was the prophet, immediately directed by a divine call. One William Matthews, of Bristol, was his high priest. This assumption of a prophetic office, in 1778, lost him ten of his followers, who withdrew from him in consequence of it; they did not return to Muggletonian orthodoxy, but remained true to Birch's more sober views, under the leadership of Martha Collier. There were now three divisions among the Muggletonians: the original body or Church, represented by Benedict Shield in London, and Roger Gibson in New York; the Birchites, or Anti-church; and the Collierites, or Immediate-notice people. Birch was maintained in independence by the contributions of his followers, of whom in 1786 there were some thirty in

London, and others in Wales, in the parts about Pembroke. Two strange fantastic books by Birch were printed about the end of last century, they are called the *Book of Cherubical Reason*, and the *Book upon the Gospel and Regeneration*. They are more incoherent than the writings of Thomas Tany, and read like the productions of a madman. Their author seems to have outlived his influence and most of his followers, and to have died soon after the beginning of this century, but when and where has not been ascertained. Whether at this moment there are any Birchites in existence, does not appear. Very likely there may be, for these small sects die hard ; but it is scarcely probable that they continue to hold regular meetings. Their last known place of meeting was in the Barbican, and there are several persons living who remember having known Birchites. The influence of their opinions is deprecated in the following opening of a Song by James Frost, written in 1809, and included in the collection of 1829 :—

“ You faithful Muggletonians, who truly do believe
The doctrine of Muggleton to be the same as Reeve ;
Let no wise anti-followers infuse into your ear,
That a prayer Christ does hear from us mortals here below.”

As the Muggletonians countenance no form of worship whatever, their gatherings are almost entirely of a festive character. They have two yearly gatherings, or Holidays, one of which at least dates from their prophet's time ; for it was instituted 19th July, 1677, for the purpose of commemorating his release from prison on that day, and has been held annually ever since, though now, in consequence of the alteration in the calendar, it is kept on the 30th July. The account of contributions and expenses at one of the earliest of these meetings has been preserved, and is here given, as it is a curious specimen of a tavern bill nearly two hundred years ago.

At our meeteing at Holloway on the 19th of July 1682. At
Mr. Hoolbrookes at the Greene Man, Present there

The Prophitt of God

M^{rs} Muggleton

M^{rs} Delanall 00 : 05 : 00

M^{rs} Smith 00 : 05 : 00

M^{rs} Webb 00 : 05 : 00

M^{rs} Euans 00 : 05 : 00

M^r Cooper..... 00 : 05 : 00

M^{rs} Cooper 00 : 05 : 00

M^r Atkinson..... 00 : 05 : 00

M^{rs} Atkinson 00 : 05 : 00

M^r Gouldique 00 : 05 : 00

M^r Rich: Smith 00 : 05 : 00

M^r Whitehead 00 : 05 : 00

M^r Brocke..... 00 : 05 : 00

M^r Symonds..... 00 : 05 : 00

Delamain Senr. 00 : 05 : 00

M^{rs} Delamain 00 : 05 : 00

Delamain Junr. 00 : 05 : 00

M^r Burrell..... 00 : 05 : 00

M^{rs} Henn 00 : 05 : 00

M^{rs} Roe 00 : 05 : 00

Received..... 04 : 15 : 00

Monyes Paid away the 19th July 1682, at Mr. Hollbrookes at the
Greene Man in Holloway

pd for 18 Pulletts at 14d \mathfrak{p} Pullett is 01 : 01 : 00

pd for 18 Siuell Oringes at 00 : 01 : 08

pd for 6 penny post Letters of advise 00 : 00 : 07

pd for the prophitt's Coach 00 : 03 : 08

pd a porter from London wth the fowles 00 : 01 : 06

pd for 5 δ & $\frac{1}{2}$ of Bacon at 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ \mathfrak{p} δ is 00 : 03 : 04

pd for 5 large Collyflowers 00 : 01 : 00

pd for Bread and Beere 00 : 09 : 04

pd for Wine 01 : 06 : 00

pd for Dressing Meate and fowleing Linning ... 00 : 14 : 00

pd for 5 Tarts at 16^d \mathfrak{p} Tart 00 : 06 : 08

pd for Butter and Cheese 00 : 01 : 06

pd to the Servants of the House 00 : 02 : 00

pd to y^e man of the Bowleing Greene 00 : 01 : 00

ffor 1 Quartern of Tobacco 00 : 00 : 06

04 : 13 : 07

The other yearly Holiday is the anniversary of the giving of the Commission to John Reeve on the 3d, 4th, and 5th February, 1652, but now kept on the 14th, 15th, and 16th February. The two festivals are referred to as "the Holy Days" as early as 1763, and were probably so termed much before that time. These assemblies (especially the February one) bring together from various parts of the country as many of the believers as can contrive to be present.

In addition to these larger gatherings, more frequent meetings, monthly or weekly, have been arranged from time to time to suit local convenience. This custom dates also, there is little doubt, from the earliest time. "These Muggletonians," writes S. Rogers from Cambridge, in 1692, "meet at their prophet's (as they call him), where he expounds the Scriptures, and answers any question they put to him."* And "about the year 1770," we are told, "there was a small community of Muggletonians, who met every Sunday afternoon in a room one story high, built out in the garden of the Gun, a well known public house, in Islington, where they used to smoke and drink with a great Bible before them."† From the Gun, Islington, in 1770, we can trace their meetings, by help of tavern bills, to the Blue Boar, Aldersgate Street, 1787-1790, and 1796-1802; the Hampshire Hog, Peartree Street, Goswell Street, 1791-1795; the Nag's Head, Aldersgate Street, 1815; the Bull's Head, Jewin Crescent, 1818-1825; the Coach and Horses, St. John's Square, Clerkenwell, 1845, and probably to other similar places. All members of the community were expected to attend these meetings, and to contribute a small sum to the general entertainment; a trifling fine was imposed (in 1799) for non-attendance. Occasionally the fare was provided by special

* *The Post-Boy Robb'd of his Mail*, 2nd Edition, 1706, p. 425.

† *Dictionary of All Religions*, by Hannah Adams, [U.S.A.] Edited by T. Williams, N.D. [1823.] Art. Muggletonians.

bounty; this was usually the custom on the death of any well-to-do member. Hence we read that, at the monthly meeting on the 2nd March, 1831, "two legs of mutton were had, they being left by Mrs. Sarah Gandar, as a token of her spiritual love to the church, of which the following friends partook in commemoration." The only regulations that seem to have been passed for the conduct of these meetings were such as were designed to exclude discussions on "natural" matters, that is, any subjects except those, which concerned points of faith. A resolution to this effect was passed on 24th November, 1793, and "signed by the Church present," twenty-five in number. Again, on the 4th March, 1798, we find the following prudent regulation subscribed by forty-one members present. "For the peace and good order of the Church, it is agreed on by this Church that no natural affairs, neither public nor private, shall be brought up in this Church, so as to disturb the peace of it. And if any person or persons shall bring up any natural affairs, either public or private, so as to disturb the Church, and being called to order by the Church shall not comply therewith,—the reckoning shall be paid, *and the Church leave the room, and leave the disturbers of it to themselves*; and if any money shall be above the reckoning, the said money to be put into the Closet and spent the next meeting." O sensible Church!

There was a book-closet belonging to the Society, for the safe custody of which, at the inn which formed their place of meeting, they paid a certain rent. Otherwise they had no local habitation as a Society, up to last year, 1869; now, however, a new era in their history has been begun, by their acquirement, for the first time, of a home which they can call their own. The place of meeting at present held on lease by the Muggletonians of London and the vicinity, is a small house, in New Street, off Bishopsgate Street Without. This New Street, which was considerably widened some years ago,

is specially interesting to the community, inasmuch as they believe it to occupy the same site as Walnut Tree Yard, in which Lodowicke Muggleton was born in 1609; and it is possible they may be right. Their meeting room is on the first floor, and might, at a pinch, hold seventy people; on the floors above and below it are dressing and cloak rooms, and the apartments of the keeper. Beside the fire-place in the meeting room hangs the full length portrait of Muggleton by William Wood; and between the front windows is placed the following inscription :

THIS TABLET

WAS ERECTED ON THE 16TH DAY OF MAY,
1869,

To commemorate the opening of the

NEW READING ROOM,

No. 7, New Street, Bishopgate. But more

especially to denote the place as formerly called

WALNUT TREE YARD,

WHERE THE LORD'S LAST WITNESS WAS BORN.

ALSO,

To record the names of a few of our

Christian Brethren, who, as believers in

THE THIRD COMMISSION

declared by

JOHN REEVE & LODOWICK MUGGLETON,

have greatly aided the Church, & partly

endowed the present building.

BENEFACTORS.

CATHERINE PEERS,

JOHN GANDAR,

JOSEPH GANDAR,

JOSEPH FROST,

ISAAC FROST.

TRUSTEES.

JAMES P. SMITH,

J. D. ASPLAND

WM. CATES,

ISAAC FROST, Jr.

Here, on the evenings of the 14th, 15th, 16th of February last, the believers assembled; never to the number of more than forty, nor more than twenty-five men at one time. Of those present only one-fourth, it was said, were born in the faith. Their business was to converse, take a meal together, and sing selections from the Divine Song Book. On the first evening the proceedings opened with tea, about five o'clock. About six, the Commission Song ("Arise, my soul, arise!") was sung, not by all the company, but by a lady who volunteered to do so. Then came in a large bowl of port wine negus, with slices of lemon floating upon its surface, and the believer whose seniority entitled him to take the lead in the proceedings (there was no chairman) gave, "Our usual toast—absent friends, and all the household of faith wherever they may be." The negus was conveyed into wine glasses by means of an antique silver ladle, the gift of a former believer (who bore the appropriate name of Mr. Thomas Spooner). When it had been handed round, more songs were heard; each person who chose volunteering to sing one. None of the airs were sacred, with the single exception of the evening-hymn tune, which had a very discordant sound as applied to a production of Boyer Glover's, beginning, "Oh! wondrous, great, amazing, strange." In about an hour, beer was brought in, but few partook of it; and by half-past eight supper was ready. It was a plain, substantial meal; consisting of a round of beef, a ham, cheese, butter, bread, and beer. Throughout the evening, every one seemed heartily to enjoy himself and herself, with no lack of friendliness, but with complete decorum. No speeches were made, but between the songs conversation became pretty general. By ten o'clock all were on their way homeward.

It is not necessary to describe the programme of two subsequent evenings, which very closely resembled the opening

one, except that the negus was omitted, and the time occupied was shorter. At the breaking up of the Holiday on Wednesday evening, a very short speech was made, or rather a few words were said, by one of the principal members. He referred to the fact that this was their 218th Anniversary, and the first occasion of its being held in a room of their own. He referred also to the fact that, for the first time in their history, a stranger had been permitted to attend their February Holiday, and paid the present writer the compliment of saying that he thought there had been no harm done, and that the experiment might safely be repeated.

One virtue, if it be a virtue, the modern Muggletonians seem to have nearly lost; the virtue, namely, of passing sentence of damnation upon their fellow creatures. In the prophet's days it was regarded almost as a duty, certainly as a mark of faith, and a means of strengthening faith, for private believers to pass this sentence in proper cases.* There were only two limitations to the exercise of the power; one was, that Muggleton himself reserved the privilege of taking off, or ratifying, as the case might be, the sentence which any of his followers had imposed;† and the other was, that "if a man give sentence, and afterwards doubts, that sentence returns on a man's own head, and the party so sentenced is freed from the power of his curse."‡ Accordingly there are well authenticated instances of the use of this power by Muggleton's favourite daughter Sarah, by his wife, by his friend Dorothy Carter, and by many other believers not specified by name. In the internal controversies of Muggletonians during the last century it was a weapon frequently resorted to as an ultimatum. That it is scarcely heard of now, is due partly to the peace and quiet presently enjoyed

* *Spiritual Epistles*, ut supra, p. 340.

† *Acts of the Witnesses*, ut supra, p. 144.

‡ *Spiritual Epistles*, ut supra, p. 340.

by the body, and partly to the influence of modern ideas even upon this conservative little community. The same influence shows itself in an opinion, which is now tolerated, respecting the number of the lost. John Reeve, who was once a Universalist, going to the opposite extreme, expresses himself as "fully satisfied that there is a generality of men and women ordained to an estate of unbelief that they might everlastingly perish."* He charitably held, however, that all children without exception will be saved.† Muggleton, who in 1662 declared that "the greatest part of mankind" are the seed of the serpent, yet considered, in 1665, that half the world would be saved, counting children, and half would prove reprobate.‡ Notwithstanding this, the present writer has been informed, by a much respected member of the body, that in friendly talk upon the subject with a fellow believer of more conservative tendencies than himself, his friend held that very few would be saved, while he on the contrary believed that very few would be damned; and he expressly ascribed his own view to the influence of modern opinions upon the subject.

The present writer has indeed seen and conversed with a sensible Muggletonian, who yet was bold enough to pass the damnatory sentence upon an unfortunate Swedenborgian lecturer; but the majority of existing believers would probably never think of following this example. Among the last instances of the formal delivery of this sentence in writing, is that of the Author of *Waverley*, who was sentenced under that title by the late Robert Wallis, on the 18th July, 1826, on account of offensive expressions in the novel of *Woodstock*, which speak of "those Grindletonians or Muggle-

* *Stream from the Tree of Life*, *ut supra*, p. 52.

† *Divine Looking Glass*, 3rd Edition 1719, p. 155.

‡ *Interpretation of Eleventh Chapter of Revelation*, p. 23. *Spiritual Epistles*, *ut supra*, p. 180.

tonians in whom is the perfection of every foul and blasphemous heresy, united with such an universal practice of hypocritical assentuation, as would deceive their master, even Satan himself.”* The latest case of all is perhaps that of the notorious Richard Carlile, who in his coarse way had made much game of the little sect, telling them “though they have no priests, they stand in much need of a school-master,” and indulging in sundry unmannerly jests respecting members of the body in Nottingham. At that time Joseph and Isaac Frost were living, and they jointly passed the sentence on him by letter.†

The works of Reeve and Muggleton are the following, enumerated here in the order of their publication.

Transcendent Spiritual Treatise, 1652.

General Epistle from the Holy Spirit, 1653.

Remonstrance from the Eternal God, 1653.

Divine Looking Glass, 1656.

Joyful News from Heaven, 1658.

Interpretation of Revelation, cap. XI., 1662.

Neck of the Quakers' Broken, 1663.

Letter to Thomas Taylor, 1664.

Interpretation of Whole of Revelation, 1665.

Looking Glass for George Fox, 1668.

Witch of Endor, 1669.

Answer to William Penn, 1673.

Acts of the Witnesses, 1699. *Written*, 1677.

Sacred Remains, 1706. *Written*, 1652-1657.

Occasional Discourse, 1719. *Written*, 1668.

Answer to Isaac Pennington, 1719. *Partly Printed*, 1669.

Spiritual Epistles, 1755. *Written*, 1653-1691.

Stream from Tree of Life, 1758. *Written*, 1654-1682.

Supplement to Book of Letters, 1831. *Written*, 1656-1688.

* *Woodstock*, 1826, vol. 3, p. 205. Sir Walter evidently had in view, not Muggletonians, of whom he knew nothing, but Familists.

† See Carlile's publication, *The Lion*, ii. 13, and iii. 9.