

John Hepburn and His Book Against Slavery, 1715

BY HENRY J. CADBURY

NEW JERSEY is justified in being proud of its saint and antislavery pioneer, John Woolman, the tailor of Mount Holly. The object of this brief paper is to cast a little light on an obscure East Jersey predecessor of his in the cause of the oppressed slave, John Hepburn. I may introduce him by reprinting what I wrote about him some years ago.¹ After mentioning the rare Keithian tract against slavery I said:

Scarce likewise is the next piece to be mentioned, *The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule, or an Essay to prove the Unlawfulness of Making Slaves of Men* (by him who Loves the Freedom of the Souls and Bodies of All Men, John Hepburn. Printed in the year 1715.) This is a ninety-four page octavo book, but copies at the British Museum and the Boston Public Library (the latter lacking the title page and text pages after page 40) are perhaps the only ones in existence. It is generally supposed that the author, who calls England his native land, was living and writing in America, perhaps in New Jersey, and that his book was printed in England. But nothing is known about him and it is really only circumstantial evidence that makes us regard him as a Friend. He mentions various Friends including John Saltkill (Salkeld) and Thomas Chalkley, "who openly bear their testimony against this abomination in their public assemblies," but adds nothing to our list of printed anti-slavery items except the *American Defence*.

What he says in this full and interesting preface anticipates by over two centuries the conclusions drawn in this note respecting the scarcity of antislavery writings, the hesitation of authors to appear in print against

¹ "Quaker Bibliographical Notes" on the earliest Antislavery Writings in the *Bulletin of Friends Historical Association*, vol. 26 [1937], pp. 41 ff.

the custom, and the rapid disappearance of such protests as were made public. He writes: "And now, Reader, I am going to show thee a wonder, and that is, this thirty years I have been in America this practice has been carried on in almost profound silence. . . . I have lain dormant above this thirty years . . . I was silent so long because I waited for my betters to undertake the works; and if any had appeared in this work, it is like I had been silent still." Referring to the few earlier publications² he complains: "But the most of all those writings I doubt are destroyed by negro masters; that the reader will find them almost as scarce to be found as the Phenix Egg."³

A reviewer of this article rightly refers to John Hepburn as one of whom very little is known and yet his book with two others are the only pieces against slavery known to have appeared in print before 1729. The other two are by George Keith, 1693, and Samuel Sewall (*The Selling of Joseph*, 1700). Indeed all the knowledge of Hepburn previously applied to his book was derived from the book itself. The following data, about both the man and the book, slight as they are may be a welcome addition.

THE MAN

John Hepburn's book makes it clear that he was an emigrant to America about 1684 for he contrasts himself with

² The Quaker pieces by Fox and Keith and some references by non-Friends (John Tillotson and Cotton Mather). Two pieces he reprints *in extenso* in his book. One is from the *Athenian Oracle*, second edition, London 1704; the other, written according to J. H. by another hand, a piece apparently unknown to bibliographers in general and bibliographers on slavery. "Arguments against Making Slaves of men. Written by a native of America, September 14, 1713." The first of these may be by a Friend, but very likely none of the three authors involved was a Friend.

³ Since Pastorius was involved in the earliest Quaker petition of 1688 it is interesting to know that his library came later to include both the earliest printed pieces (Keith and Hepburn) now so rare, and also Fox's *Gospel Family-Order*, which was reprinted (I think at Philadelphia) in 1701. See M. D. Learned, *The Life of Francis Daniel Pastorius*, 1908, pp. 257, 278. Pastorius copied out much of Hepburn's book in his unpublished miscellany, *The Beehive*. It was largely reprinted by Samuel Allinson, Jr., in the *Non-Slaveholder* (vol. 2 [1847], pp. 148 ff.; vol. 3 [1848], pp. 211 ff.) from a copy signed by his ancestor "Thomas Scattergood, 1730." This may be the mutilated copy which Enoch Lewis mentions in 1851 as having been before him (*Friends Review*, vol. 5, p 88).

the "native of America," the anonymous author of the "Arguments against Making Slaves of Men" which he prints (for the first time). He also speaks of thirty years he has been in America.

This fits exactly the evidence in a list still extant⁴ of indentured servants. The list is headed as follows:

The names of such persons as were imported into this province and brought to be Registered in the books of Recorde are as followes, ented this 5th day of december Anno domini 1684.

Upon the Accompt of such of the proprietors of province as belongs to Scotland.

Twenty-four names follow under this first division—all marked "per Indenture for four years"; the eleventh is John Haburne.

On May 12, 1687, a petition of about twenty of the Scotch proprietors' servants for head land was entered on the minutes of the Council of Proprietors of the Eastern Division of New Jersey at Amboy Perth "to be laid out to them near Blew Hills." They were entitled by law to thirty acres apiece. It was "agreed they have the same, adjoining the land already granted to the Scotch Proprietors, their masters for head land." John Hebron appears in this list.⁵ So also about a year later when John Hebron and other recipients transfer the lands so received "to Robert Barclay of Urie, governor of the province, for and in consideration of a certain sum of money by us in hand already received of Robert Barclay,"⁶ and when the proprietors announce their ratifica-

⁴ Office of the Secretary of State, Trenton, New Jersey, Book A, p. 155. The text is printed not quite correctly in James Steen, *New Aberdeen*, Matawan, N. J., 1899, pp. 26 ff.

⁵ Volume for 1685-1705 in the writing of James Emott, Secretary of the province, p. 82, in the office of the Proprietors at Perth Amboy, New Jersey. For this procedure see G. J. Miller in the volume on *The Minutes of the Board of Proprietors of the Eastern Division of New Jersey*, Perth Amboy, 1949, pp. 32 ff.

⁶ Book B, vol. 3, no. 404 at the same office, printed in Steen, *op. cit.*, p. 16. Cf. the survey (undated) Book L, p. 209.

tion of this transfer.⁷ All these documents clearly indicate the usual process by which those who migrated to the province without means of their own refunded their patrons by taking the position of indentured servants which entitled them also to an assignment of lands called head lands which in turn was transferred to the patron. Thus John Hebron or Hepburn was nominally an indentured servant of the Scots proprietors, and specifically of Robert Barclay, who is described as "of Ury in the Kingdom of Scotland, Esquire and Governor in chief of our said province" but who is better known to Friends as the author of the famous *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*.

Many later transactions, using the names John Hepburn and John Hebron interchangeably, appear in the records of real estate both in the archives in Trenton and in those at Perth Amboy. I shall content myself by referring only to the abstracts in the printed archives. In 1693 Hepburn is described as late of Cheesquake in Middlesex County and a tailor and the recipient of 300 acres in the same county on the Raritan River.⁸ In April, 1695, he is described as of Amboy, a tailor, in a deed by which he received a lot at Freehold at the first branch of Deep Run,⁹ and in October of the same year he disposes of the 300 acres on the Raritan River.¹⁰ In March, 1700/1, and in June, 1701, he shares with many other persons, "all of Monmouth County," the benefit of property or a right of way. The locations are described as on Whingsunk Neck or Matawan Creek or Wickatunck.¹¹

⁷ Book C, vol. 4, no. 25, dated June 24, 1688. This is the same proceeding involving a transfer of some 500 acres of lands "in Essex County at the mouth of Turkie Brook on the Rahway River" mentioned in the records of the Secretary of State of New Jersey at Trenton. Cf. *Archives of the State of New Jersey*, First Series, vol. 21, Patterson, 1899, pp. 120, 132.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 324, 327.

Before proceeding further I may mention John Hebron's marriage. His wife was Ann or Anna, daughter of Thomas Laurie. With her father and brother James she "imported" herself to East Jersey in December, 1683. In 1685-6 Thomas Laurie also owned land in Cheesquake, in Middlesex County. We soon learn that this land was on Raritan bay and that he was a tailor.¹² But by 1695 and 1696 he is described as of Hortencie, and receives in turn by deed three contiguous lots at Wickatunck, though in 1698 he transfers them to his only son James and is himself now described as "of Freehold, tailor."¹³ That is still descriptive of him when on March 6, 1712/3 he made his will. He still owned then a farm on Raritan Bay next below the Amboy Ferry House and he mentions beside his children James and Anna, his son-in-law John Hepburn.¹⁴ This is not the first evidence of their marriage; indeed it must have occurred much earlier, at any rate before September, 1695, when Ann Hebrone appears among the witnesses to a Quaker wedding in Shrewsbury.¹⁵

We may pause here to observe the parallel between the career of John Hepburn and that of his wife's family. They both came to America about 1683 or 1684. John and his father-in-law were both tailors. (Was this a case of an apprentice marrying his master's daughter?) Both of them originally had land on Raritan bay or river at Cheesquake. Thomas Laurie's farm was near the Amboy Ferry House, John Hebron was a tailor in Amboy. It will be recalled that just about the time they were settling in America Amboy

¹² *Archives of the State of New Jersey*, vol. 23, pp. 76, 80, 106, 119. On May 29, 1684, the Governor and Council granted him a patent for sixty acres of land to be surveyed "on the west side of Raritan River against Amboy Point." (*Archives*, vol. 13, p. 127).

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 287-8 (four entries).

¹⁴ *New Jersey Wills*, vol. 1, 1670-1730 (*Archives of the State of New Jersey*, vol. 23 [1901], p. 286.) The will was proved Aug. 2, 1714. John Hepburn was executor.

¹⁵ John E. Stillwell, *Historical and Genealogical Miscellany*, vol. 1 [1903] p. 247.

was being developed as a new settlement.¹⁶ In like manner we know that Freehold was settled shortly before 1700.¹⁷ Thomas Laurie and John Hebron (Hepburn) were therefore both among the early settlers in both places.

A further connection between son-in-law and father-in-law is to be found in the former's book. Indeed without it one would not be so sure that the John Hepburn of the *American Defence* was the John Hebron (rarely Hepburn) of the East Jersey records. I refer to the three essays on the subjects of baptism and predestination which follow those on slavery. They are assigned to Thomas Lowry or Laurie and were written in 1707 or 1709. The copy at the Boston Public Library lacks, as already noted, this part of the volume, and hence this evidence. When mentioned in bibliographies they are not correctly connected. John Hepburn in the postscript testifies to the integrity of the author. He does not indicate that the author is his own father-in-law and that he had recently died. And once more the younger man follows the elder's example for he publishes next a letter of his own signed J. H. and dated New-Jersey, 5th month, 1714. It also is on baptism, and evidently is addressed to a Baptist and in answer to an Anti-Quaker piece (otherwise unknown to me), as will be seen from its opening words: "Friend Silby, I have seen thy Book called: The Fallacy of the Quakers, in which thou asserts Christian Baptism to be with water." In his Advertisement to the Reader he says that he submitted these questions to the Yearly Meeting of Water-Baptists at Middletown in 1712 and "likewise this present year 1714 at the same place but they gave me no answer."

¹⁶ W. A. Whitehead, *Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy*, New York, 1856.

¹⁷ Governor Joel Parker, "Monmouth County in the Provincial Era" in *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, Second Series, vol. 3, [1872-4], p. 46.

Few further facts about John Hebron are recorded. In 1706/7 he is one of several witnesses at a Quaker marriage at Shrewsbury.¹⁸ On May 26, 1709, he witnessed a will at Freehold.¹⁹ In 1714 he is mentioned as one of the commissioners appointed by Act of the General Assembly for the laying out of highways in the County of Monmouth who still survived.²⁰ His name appears in the same capacity in a memorandum of 28th of April 1715.²¹ Again in 1720 he witnessed a will in Freehold, this time of a kind of distant connection, for the testator, William Redford or Radford, was the father-in-law of James Laurie, the brother of Anna Hepburn. Indeed she is the other witness to this will and they spell their surnames differently, "John Hepburn" and "Anna Hebron."²²

Probably John Hepburn lived on to a ripe old age. In January, 1744/5, his son John Hepburn, Junior, yeoman of Freehold, in his will makes provision for the care of his father John Hepburn, Senior. The latter is of course our John Hepburn. Evidently he was then a widower, since the testator makes no mention of his mother, Anna Hepburn. Nor did John Hepburn, Junior, leave any wife or children of his own when he died soon after (the will was proved February 4, 1744/5). He does mention the following members of the family: a brother James Hepburn of Windsor Township, with his sons John and James; a sister Naomi, evidently the

¹⁸ Stillwell, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 255.

¹⁹ *New Jersey Archives*, vol. 23, p. 94.

²⁰ Stillwell, *op. cit.*, vol. 3 [1914], p. 402. Cf. Edwin Laing, *Genealogical Record*, p. lxxviii in Edwin Salter, *History of Monmouth and Ocean Counties*, 1890. The source is not given.

²¹ Book F, page 1 in the County Clerk's office at Freehold, quoted in Steen, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

²² *Archives*, vol. 23, pp. 376-7. This will was proved in 1726. James Laurie himself was no longer a resident of Freehold. In 1705 he had bought 187 acres near Allentown, on which he built a cabin and remained the rest of his life, according to the *Genealogical Record* in Edwin Salter, *op. cit.*, p. xxxvi.

wife of Jeremiah Castner, and another sister Elizabeth, wife of Charles Jolley and mother of John and James Jolley.²³

How long John Hepburn, Senior, outlived his namesake I do not know. Having deeded land to both his sons in 1743 he probably was supported by them or by their estates and left no will of his own. An account rendered to settle the estate of John Hepburn, Junior, in 1764 suggests by its equal charges to his estate and to his brother James that their care of their aged father had recently terminated. The John Hepburn of Piscataway who appears between 1748 and 1767 in the lists of freeholders, in wills as witness or executor, or more often as one of the two appraisers making an inventory,²⁴ is probably the third John Hepburn, grandson of John, Senior, and son of James Hepburn. His own will dated in 1769 and proved in 1771 leaves his whole estate to his wife Sarah²⁵ and suggests that this was the John Hepburn who married in March or April, 1734, Sarah Laing after the manner of Friends.²⁶

Unfortunately none of the evidence cited indicates with certainty whether either John Hepburn, Senior, or his wife Anna, were Friends. That each of them once attended a Quaker marriage at Shrewsbury and signed the certificate as witnesses is not evidence, and their names do not appear again on the records of births and marriages of Shrewsbury

²³ New Jersey Wills, vol. 2, 1730-1750 (*Archives*, vol. 30 [1913], p. 232.) One of the executors was the testator's cousin Thomas Laurie of Upper Freehold who proved the will as a Quaker.

²⁴ *Archives*, vol. 30, 32, 33, see indexes.

²⁵ Abstracts of Wills, vol. 5, 1771-1780 (*New Jersey Archives*, vol. 34 [1931], p. 241.) O. E. Monnette, *First Settlers of the Plantations of Piscataway and Woodbridge*, Los Angeles, part 6, 1934, p. 1187, says that John Hepburn Senior died in 1770 aged 103 years, evidently identifying him with this testator. But on examining the originals at Trenton I find the signature of this will agrees with various signatures in 1742, 1749, 1757, 1759 but neither with the signature of John Hepburn, Jr., in 1741 and 1744/5 nor with the signature of John Hepburn (presumably senior) in 1720 and 1728/9.

²⁶ Minutes of Plainfield and Rahway Monthly Meeting. But the same meeting's minutes record the disownment in March, 1756, of a John Hepburn for marrying out of meeting.

monthly meeting 1674-1731. The minutes prior to 1732 are missing. Of course even as late as that date membership was not a matter of complete lists and is only indicated when occasion warrants on the minutes of Friends' meetings. The records of other Friends' meetings in the county of Monmouth are lacking.

As for Thomas Laurie and his family it is commonly said that he was brother to Gawen Laurie, Deputy Governor of East Jersey from 1684 to 1686.²⁷ Yet the will of Gawen Lawry, drawn in August, 1687, while it mentions his brother Arthur and the children of his sisters Christian and Agnes and the children of his own children, James Laury (deceased), Mary Haige and Rebecca Foster, mentions no brother Thomas.²⁸ The property of Thomas on the Raritan was next to that of Gawen. The latter was certainly a Friend. So was William Redford, father-in-law of James Laurie. Moreover Thomas Laurie's controversial work was in accordance with Quaker beliefs. Yet none of these facts carry evidence of membership for any of his family.

The same may be said of John Hepburn's use of 5th month in his letter to Silby and of the fact that he is meeting an anti-Quaker argument. These also are only to be added to other items of circumstantial evidence which I noted earlier.

The facts of the situation, so far as I now see them, would be met if John Hepburn was not connected with any religious group. Certainly he was not a Water-Baptist. He refers to the Baptists' meeting at Middletown as "their" meeting. His name is not included among nearly 70 of their members named in 1713.²⁹ This was indeed a very old

²⁷ Salter, *op. cit.*, p. xxxvi. W. A. Whitehead, *East Jersey under the Proprietary Governments*, 1846, p. 126, Second Edition, Newark, 1875, p. 169 note says more cautiously, "probably a brother of the deputy governor." He adds: "Descendants of him are yet living in the southern part of the state."

²⁸ *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, Third Series, vol. 7 [1912-13], pp. 89 ff.

²⁹ William S. Hornor, *This Old Monmouth of Ours*, Freehold, 1932, p. 260.

Baptist congregation founded in 1686, the oldest in the state of New Jersey.³⁰ Curiously enough probably the very "yearly meeting" to which Hepburn refers is known to us from Morgan Edwards *History of the Baptists* written in 1792. It was a council called from all the neighboring churches and held on May 12, 1712, at Middletown to deal with a dispute in the local church which went so far that each party had excommunicated the other.³¹

The emigrant Hepburn seems to have settled for a time at what is now Matawan. This was a Scotch colony and its religious history is given pretty fully in an informative pamphlet *New Aberdeen; or the Scotch Settlement of Monmouth County, New Jersey*.³² Though John Hepburn is frequently mentioned, his affiliation with the prevailing Presbyterian membership of the Scotch settlers is not anywhere indicated.³³ It was more than half Presbyterian, but there were Quakers among the remaining members. Many of the Quaker settlers in East Jersey were Scotch, especially those that came directly from Great Britain rather than from other British colonies.

About 1686 a list of Friends' Meetings in New Jersey was ordered made, but I do not know that it is extant.³⁴ At any rate when Hepburn wrote his essay there were only three Friends' meetings in East Jersey.³⁵ These were probably Woodbridge, Plainfield and Shrewsbury. At least these are

³⁰ See Works Progress Administration, *Inventory of Church Archives of New Jersey, Baptist Bodies*, 1938, no. 138, cf. no. 142 (Holmdel).

³¹ Franklin Ellis, *History of Monmouth County, New Jersey*, Philadelphia, 1885, pp. 526 ff. The records of the quarrel were ordered destroyed, Hornor, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

³² By James Steen, A.M., Counsellor-at-Law, Matawan, N. J., 1899.

³³ If Steen had known it, he would have mentioned Hebron's church connection on p. 35. Other references to him occur on pages 4, 16, 26, 29.

³⁴ For an account of the first meetings and meeting houses in East Jersey see *The Friend* (Philadelphia), vol. 4 [1831], p. 197.

³⁵ "John Farmer's First American Journey 1711-1714," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 53 [1944], p. 84.

the regular meetings mentioned by travelling English visitors who passed among Friends. Samuel Bownas in 1726 after attending regular meetings of Friends at Woodbridge, an unnamed place, and Shrewsbury, says that at Middletown the Baptists lent their meeting house, and that at Freehold a meeting was arranged in the court house. Of the attenders there he says: "The people were of an ignorant sort who made no profession of any religion."³⁶

So far as I have been able to find minutes for these meetings there is no evidence of any John Hepburn (Hebron) in membership until in March or April, 1734, the minutes of Woodbridge monthly meeting speak of a John Hepburn who married Sarah Laing, evidently both Friends, for the marriage was under the meeting's care, while the same meeting in March, 1756, disowned a John Heburn for marrying a non-Friend. These men are hardly the same as the essay writer. They could be his son or more likely his nephew or some other family. There was an Edward Heburn in the same meeting whose wife Rebecca bore him a child in 1708 and his second wife Barbara bore children in 1710 and 1711.³⁷

Organized religion in the American colonies in their pioneer days made progress with difficulties. In many places the only settled congregations were of Quakers, and these for the regular churchmen seemed worse than nothing. In East Jersey even the Quakers had special difficulties. Some of them are especially associated with George Keith. He was an orthodox and active Friend when from 1685 to 1689 he

³⁶ *An Account of . . . Samuel Bownas, Friends Library*, Philadelphia, vol. 3 [1839], p. 56. Richard Hartshorne (1641-1722), the Friend who sold the land at Middletown for the Baptist Meeting House, stipulated that Friends should have the use of the house for Friends' meetings whenever strangers visited them. So *The Friend*, *loc. cit.* According to Ernest W. Mandeville, *The Story of Middletown*, Middletown, 1927, p. 97, the deed and the owner were later, viz. Robert Hartshorne in 1734.

³⁷ Information from Friends' records in New York of Woodbridge (later called Rahway and Plainfield) Monthly Meeting kindly furnished by John Cox, Jr.

served as Surveyor General with his home in Freehold having beside a large house in Amboy.³⁸ Soon after, however, he moved to Pennsylvania and seceded from Friends and set up his own sect of "Christian Quakers." Evidently the meetings in his old neighborhood were affected by the schism. The monthly meeting that was originally held at Amboy and then at Woodbridge according to its own early minute "fell from the year 1689 to the year 1704 by reason of George Keith's Separation."³⁹ When it was resumed it was much weakened. There was a Keithian Yearly Meeting at Topanemus, near Freehold. But about 1700 Keith became an Episcopalian and more than that, the aggressive agent of the S.P.G. As such he visited Shrewsbury, Middletown, Freehold, in 1702, 1703 and 1704, as his *Journal of Travels* tells us.⁴⁰ Besides upsetting the old line Quakers he undermined his own sect. Tradition says at Topanemus he carried away the whole meeting to form the Episcopal Church of Freehold.⁴¹ Churches of the Anglican sort were projected as early as 1703 in Amboy and at Shrewsbury, the latter under the patronage of Colonel Lewis Morris.⁴² Converts to the Church were baptized by Talbot at Freehold, Amboy and Rahway, East Jersey.

Of Freehold itself, the first home of Keith and long the home of John Hepburn, we have this statement of Colonel Morris in 1700.

³⁸ For this period of his life see E. W. Kirby, *George Keith 1638-1716*, 1942, pp. 48-53.

³⁹ Works Progress Administration, *Inventory of Church Archives in New York City, Religious Society of Friends*, 1940, p. 62.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ellis, *op. cit.*, pp. 411 ff. With Keith's own account may be compared that by his opponent, Thomas Story, *Friends Library*, Philadelphia, vol. 10 [1846], p. 139, dealing with the Yearly Meeting at Shrewsbury in October, 1703. According to John Talbot he and Keith had considerable success with the Keithian Quakers though not with the other ("Foxonian") Quakers.

⁴¹ *Church Archives in New York City* (as above), p. 62.

⁴² George M. Hills, *History of the Church in Burlington*, Trenton, 1876, pp. 30, 36, 40, 45. The church at Amboy was not completed until 1722. W. A. Whitehead, *Contributions*, p. 219.

Freehold was settled from Scotland (Mr. Keith began the first settlement there and made a fine Plantation which he afterwards Sold, and went into Pensilvania) and about the one half of it are Scotch Presbyterians, and a sober people, the other part of it was settled by People . . . who are generally speaking of no religion. There is in this town a Quaker Meeting house, but most of the Quakers who built it are come off with Mr. Keith; they have not fixt yet on any religion.⁴³

These revolutionary proceedings probably left many persons without any church affiliation, although intimate with the Friends in the neighboring meetings and actually in sympathy with their beliefs. John Hepburn's situation may have been of this sort. He knew among other earlier protests against slavery that of the Keithians, "George Keith his party." He also knew what the orthodox travelling Quaker ministers Salkeld and Chalkley taught on the subject.

These uncertain considerations appear to be settled by an unexpected form of evidence, which is as conclusive as could be expected in the absence of official Quaker records. In the office of the Secretary of State at Trenton two wills involving John Hebron exist in which we have not only his signature but a report on the manner of his proving them. The first, dated Perth Amboy, 31 May 1709, reads:

Then appeared before me Richard Ingoldesby as Lieutenant Governor of her Majesty's Province of New Jersey, New York, etc. John Hepburne and John Brown . . . and the said Hepburne took his attestation or solemn affirmation according to Act of Parliament. . . .⁴⁴

The second, dated Perth Amboy, 1 April 1721, is more explicit:

Then personally appeared before me Michael Kearny, surrogate appointed by his Excellency William Burnet, Esq., Captain General and Governor in Chief, etc. John Hepburn, being as he says of the people called Quakers, who being affirmed according to the act of Assembly do

⁴³ *New Jersey Historical Collections*, vol. 4, p. 8.

⁴⁴ The will of William Clark of Freehold, Book V, p. 99.

[sic] declare that he saw the within testator William Radford sign, seal. . . .⁴⁵

Like every other known opponent of slavery from Nantucket to North Carolina for many decades, John Hepburn was a Quaker.

THE BOOK

LOCATIONS AND CONTENTS

As already indicated only two copies of Hepburn's book are known. That in the British Museum is complete. Its contents represent continuous pagination and signatures, extending to more than a hundred pages. The title page runs:

The American Defense of the Christian Golden Rule, Or An Essay to prove the unlawfulness of making Slaves of Men. By him who Loves the Freedom of the Souls and Bodies of All Men, John Hepburn. Printed in the Year 1715.

The contents continue:

The Preface to the Reader [subscribed] New Jersey, 1st Month, 1714 John Hepburn	5 pages unnumbered
The American Defense of the Christian Golden Rule [etc]	pages 1-22
Arguments against making Slaves of Men. [subscribed] Written by a Native of America. Sept. 14. 1713	pages 23-36
The Athenian Oracle	pages 37-44
[Half Title] A Short Answer to that Part of Predestination Which Asserts that Christ dyed for none but the Elect. . . . Written in love for the benefit of Mankind, 1707 By Thomas Lowry [Title page and verso unnumbered]	

⁴⁵ Book M, no. 306.

A Short Answer [etc]	pages 45-62
Good News to all Parents Of such Children, as die in their Infant state [etc] [subscribed] Thomas Laury	pages 63-74
[Half Title] Salvation without Outward Baptism. . . . Written in love to the Children of Men, July 1st 1789 By Thomas Lowry [Bible Text]	pages [75-76]
Salvation without Outward Baptism [etc]	pages 77-82
[Heading] What sins we are to Remit, and what we are not to Remit. [subscribed] June 10, 1709 Thomas Lawry	pages 83-89
Post-script, Christian Reader [etc] [subscribed] John Hepburn	pages 90-92
Advertisement to the Reader. [subscribed] New-Jersey, 5th Month, 1714 J. H.	pages 92-94

THE END

In this reproduction we have omitted pages 37-89. The copy at the Boston Public Library lacks title and all after page 40. It is in the Thomas Prince Collection which came to the custody of the Boston Public Library in 1867, and is number 4 in a bound volume of seventeen items. Thomas Prince's own manuscript catalogue of his "New-English" library is at the Massachusetts Historical Society, but does not include this item, since it is not connected with New England. It is listed under "Slavery" in the printed catalogue.⁴⁶ It contains the following manuscript note which, though erroneous in the last two sentences, correctly estimates the importance of the work. The author is Edward Eggleston (1837-1902), the Indiana historian and novelist.

This little pamphlet is probably unique. It is unknown I believe to all who have written respecting the antislavery agitations of the time. Sabin has the title but from the catalogue of this library and without remark. Joseph Smith did not know it. It is the first tract against slave-

⁴⁶ *The Prince Library. The American Part of the Collection*, Boston [1868], p. 57.

holding published in the eighteenth century, the first serious and systematic attack on slavery that I know. Hepburn precedes Burling by four years and Lay and Sandiford by a long gap. This appears to have been printed in London, and written by a native American in New Jersey. See Colophon, p. 40.

Sept. 11, 1886

Edw. Eggleston

The colophon however does not apply to the first and longest part of the volume, whose author plainly distinguishes himself from the later author by indicating that he was a native of Great Britain who had come to America some thirty years before. It is the appended piece on "Arguments against making Slaves of Men," pp. 23-36 with its lists of twenty arguments, nine objections and answers, twenty motives (interrupted by proposals) that Hepburn assigns to "another hand," and that is signed by a native of America. Since it is signed Sept. 14, 1713, it must compete with Hepburn's own work for priority. The word "September" suggests that the anonymous author was not a Quaker.

The question of imprint raised by Eggleston is not so easily settled, but in all probability the tract came from the press of William Bradford in New York.

John Hepburn speaks with first-hand knowledge of slavery. While the institution was, as he repeatedly says (p. 9 ff), not European, in his own area of East Jersey as elsewhere in the British colonies it was an accepted practice, and accepted by all kinds of Christians. Long before Anthony Benezet publicized the cruelties of the slave trade, John Hepburn is acquainted with them. An important rendezvous for slave ships was the chief port at Perth Amboy to which he was never a distant neighbor.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In 1726 the Collector of Customs at Perth Amboy reports only 115 Negroes imported there from the West Indies since 1718, none at all from Africa and none from anywhere from 1698 to 1717 (*New Jersey Archives*, vol. 5, p. 152), but this does not mean that slaves were not imported from other colonies or sold at Perth Amboy. That in 1714 a law was adopted levying a tax on imported slaves implies that there was such a trade.

"Barracks of considerable size once stood in Perth Amboy, near the junction of Smith and Water streets, in which the slaves were immured as imported; and there, as in almost every place, the labor of families with very few exceptions, was exclusively performed by blacks for many years previous to the Revolution."⁴⁸

As early as 1702 the Governor, then Lord Cornbury, was notified by the Queen that the Royal African Company had been instructed to provide the province with "a constant and sufficient supply of merchantable negroes, at moderate rates."⁴⁹ This company was given an extensive monopoly over African trade. Once for a limited period in 1714 an act was passed levying a duty of £10 upon every negro imported. It went into effect June 1 of that year and remained for seven years.⁵⁰ It was probably aimed at increasing the influx of white labor rather than due to humanitarian motives, and like similar laws in Pennsylvania probably it lapsed or was vetoed by the Crown.

As for slavery itself John Hepburn emphasizes both the sins of the masters and the privations and the hardships suffered by the slaves. He knows for example that they are deprived of leisure on the First day of the week, since their masters leave them that day alone for their own necessary duties (page 6). He recounts how one of them not far from the time and place of writing had shot himself in despair (p. 5). He mentions as do other Quaker objectors the tendency of the institution to make the owners and their families luxurious and indolent (pp. 3 ff).

John Hepburn is induced to publish this piece by sense of duty. Like Samuel Sewall before publishing in 1700 his

⁴⁸ W. A. Whitehead, *Contributions*, p. 317.

⁴⁹ A. Leaming and J. Spicer, *The Grants, Concessions and Original Constitutions of the Province of New Jersey*, Philadelphia, 1752 [Reprinted, Somerville, N. J., 1881], p. 640.

⁵⁰ S. Allinson, *Acts of the General Assembly, 1702-1776*, Burlington, 1776, p. 31.

tract on *The Selling of Joseph*, he had long had it on his mind and had guiltily deferred. Hepburn says he had lain dormant above this thirty years, waiting for his betters to undertake it. His language is even closer to the apology for delay found in the preface to Morgan Godwyn's sermon, *Trade preferred before Religion and Christ Made to give Place to Mammon*, 1685.

Of the predecessors in print whom he names, none is more radical than he. They usually urged mainly kind treatment of slaves and opportunity for them to hear the Gospel. George Fox had not added more than that slaves be released, much as white indentured servants were, "after a considerable term of years."⁵¹ The *Exhortation and Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes*, 1693,⁵² which is what he mentions as printed by George Keith's party at Philadelphia, goes somewhat further, and so does Cotton Mather in his *Negro Christianized*, 1706, though not in his *Rules for the Society of Negroes* as printed not long after.

In another passage Hepburn says without giving names that some of both [Church-men and Presbyterians] "have printed against it [slavery] here in North America" (p 14). Beside Mather, and indeed before Mather, Samuel Sewall might be thought of as a Presbyterian antislavery writer, in the essay already referred to, *The Selling of Joseph*, 1700. He explains in his diary⁵³ that this was suggested by a reference to Blackamoors in Baynes's commentary on Ephesians. He discloses also that as early as 1700 "Mr. C. Mather resolves to publish a sheet to exhort masters to

⁵¹ *Gospel Family Order*, 1676, p. 16. The passage is from an address at Barbados in 1671 in which he said "after 30 years' servitude." *Cambridge Journal of George Fox*, 1911, vol. 2, p. 195.

⁵² For reprint see *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 13 [1889-90], pp. 265-70. The printing is thought to have been done at New York by William Bradford.

⁵³ *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Fifth Series, vol. 6 [1879], p. 16, with a reprint of the entire tract, pp. 16-20.

labour their [Negroes'] conversion." His own argument goes further.

What Churchman (i.e. Anglican) had published anything against slavery? Tillotson cannot be cited. Morgan Godwyn's three works of 1680-1685⁵⁴ are indeed by a member of the Church of England but they were published in England and in any case he does not argue for freeing the slaves but only for their conversion. There is no evidence that Hepburn knew either Sewall's book or those of Godwyn, in spite of coincidences in argument.

Of oral objection to slavery, both Quaker and non-Quaker, Hepburn also makes mention, but our present knowledge of such objection depends on various writings either totally lost or recently published and we cannot confirm his statements. The *Journal of Thomas Chalkley* (1675-1741), first published in 1749 by Franklin and Hall, does not indicate his strong criticism of slavery, but some gruesome descriptions of ill treatment were omitted from the MS when it was printed.⁵⁵ But John Hepburn may well have heard Chalkley speak. He travelled to the Meetings in East Jersey in 1698 and often thereafter, but did not limit his meetings to Friends. John Salkeld (1672-1739) also visited "Long Island and the meetings that way" both before and after he married and settled at Chester, Pennsylvania in 1705.⁵⁶ Though we have no syllable elsewhere of his opposition to slavery, the meeting at Chester to which he

⁵⁴ See D. N. B. Godwyn knew slavery first hand in Barbados and Virginia. The Quaker tract which he admits called his attention to the negligence of Christian evangelization of Negroes (in his *Negro's and Indians Advocate*, London, 1680, pp. 4-6) can be identified as *To the Ministers, Teachers and Priests (so called, and so stiling yourselves) in Barbadoes*, by George Fox, 1672.

⁵⁵ Now printed in *The Journal of Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, vol. 10 [1943], p. 123.

⁵⁶ On John Salkeld see the extended biographical notice in *The Friend* (Philadelphia), vol. 33 [1860], pp. 372 (and continued). Cf. *The Salkeld Family of Pennsylvania*, by a Descendent [sic], n. p. 1867, with a summary and additional references in *Journal of Friends Historical Society*, vol. 13 [1916], pp. 1-4.

belonged was by 1715 notorious for its opposition to the slave trade and slavery.

LITERARY FEATURES

The essay inclines to the dialogue form, whether between a slave owner ("negro-master") and a Christian, or between a Mahometan and a Christian. The latter comparison is especially frequent in the early antislavery literature. Europeans and Americans had occasional experience of enslavement when captured by the Barbary pirates and this familiar parallel brought home independently to one writer after another the implications of the Golden Rule. The Quakers were not immune from such captivity,⁵⁷ and the earliest known Quaker antislavery writing had put the case:

How fearfull & fainthearted are many on sea when they see a strange vessel, being afraid it should be a Turck, and they should be taken and sold for slaves into Turckey. Now what is this better done as Turcks doe? Yea rather it is worse for them, which say they are Christians.⁵⁸

The parallel occurs as late as 1790 when Benjamin Franklin in one of the keenest of his satires parodies the attack in Congress upon the Quaker petition for the abolition of the slave trade by reporting a supposed speech of Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim, a member of the Divan of Algiers, defending Turkish slavery against criticism by the "Sect of Enka."⁵⁹

We may mention also the element of sarcasm occasionally found in Hepburn's pamphlet and the original attempts at verse with which both the preface and the main essay close.

⁵⁷ [Samuel Tuke], *Account of the Slavery of Friends in the Barbary States, towards the Close of the 17th Century*, 1848.

⁵⁸ Protest of Dutch Quakers in Germantown 1688. This paper long lost was first published in *The Friend* (Philadelphia), vol. 17, p. 125, on January 13, 1844. It may be consulted more conveniently in W. I. Hull, *William Penn and the Dutch Quaker Migration to Pennsylvania*, 1935, pp. 297 ff.

⁵⁹ Letter to the Editor of the *Federal Gazette*, March 23, 1790.

Hepburn's work gives an impression of culture and of reading. One would hardly expect the Quaker tailor to follow the learned procedure affected by Harvard-trained men like Mather and Sewall. He knows, however, Archbishop John Tillotson's works in an edition containing two sermons on restitution.⁶⁰ His reference to Nestorius which he attributes to Eusebius is of course an error, as Eusebius lived a century before Nestorius. But Eusebius' *Church History* was circulated in folio books in a popular English translation by Jeremiah Hanmer which contained also later church historians, including Evagrius who is the source of part of what Hepburn says of Nestorius though not the quotation from his Epistle. His reference to Poole's Annotations on Philemon (p. 11) is obscure, since Matthew Poole in his *Annotations on the Bible* so far as he deals with the Epistle to Philemon says not a word of any kind about slavery. Perhaps he is thinking of Poole's note on Eph. vi. 5 in the same work: "The servants were generally slaves. Christian Liberty doth not take away civil servitude." His excerpt from the *Athenian Oracle* is precisely described as from the Second Edition printed at London, 1704, vol. 1, pp. 545-8.⁶¹ Just where he learned that Roman Catholics argue for the Real Presence in the Mass on the ground that Eastern Orthodox at this point are in agreement (p. 18), I do not know. His reference to the concordance between man's Free Will and God's omnipotence also sounds a bit bookish, but the latter part of his pamphlet shows that, at least on subjects of controversy with Baptists, John Hepburn probably had first hand experience in the neighborhood in which he lived.

⁶⁰ These are nos. 116 and 117 in editions containing 200 sermons.

⁶¹ Except that by printer's error the pages following 544 are misnumbered 529 to 532. In his references in his own essay to slavery as Diana (pp. 3, 19) he follows the *Athenian Oracle's* "great Diana"—"by this craft they have their gain" (Acts 19: 25).

The Quaker books cited are certainly not unusual but were at the time on both sides of the Atlantic the standard books on Quaker policy. William Penn's little book, *A Key opening a way to every common understanding. How to discern the Difference betwixt the Religion professed by the People called Quakers, and the Perversions, Misrepresentations and Calumnies of their several Adversaries*, had reached a dozen editions since it was first issued in 1692. Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* 1676 was an older and a much larger work. Its author incidentally was the Governor of East Jersey when Hepburn came to the province and the proprietor in whose name Hepburn was admitted.

ARGUMENT

Hepburn keeps close to his thesis that slavery is Anti-Christian. He admits that all groups of Christians practice it in America, but he finds among them inconsistency in other matters like war, and thus he escapes the inference that their concurrence in condoning slavery is any justification. Churchmen, Presbyterians and Baptists all show zeal in some aspects of their Christian duty as they severally understand it, but in approving slavery and war they fall short of pure Christianity (p. 13).

The situation among the Quakers is particularly analyzed. In some respects they are superior to other Christians. For example they oppose war, at least they did in Robert Barclay's time. Also in America in 1692 at the time of the raising of a militia for the war at Albany all the Quakers in East Jersey refused to pay the tax levied and their goods were distrained at Amboy (except for one Friend), at Freehold, and at Shrewsbury (p. 17). This attitude had continued, but when in 1711 another requisition was made, to pay for the expedition to Canada against the French, while some of the Friends maintained their ancient testimony

against fighting with carnal weapons, the majority complied with the demand and were of sufficient influence to see that in the official records of sufferings periodically compiled by the Friends' Meetings distrains for the refusal of war tax should not be entered. This backsliding in the matter of war Hepburn associates with the earlier Quaker acceptance of political office. Magistracy involves the use of the sword and inevitably weakens the conscience against both war and slavery. This attitude of Hepburn's towards magistracy was not characteristic of Friends, and he does not imply that he had any associates in this respect. It was, however, part of the attitude of George Keith and his followers, who at the time of their conflict in Pennsylvania objected to the use of police measures by Quakers, especially ministers of the gospel among them.⁶² It was also the attitude later of the Pennsylvania German Mennonites.

Only one group of Christians in America has been according to Hepburn consistently free from slave holding. Individuals in other groups have kept their hands clean, and some English Friends who settled in America have preached against slavery, but the German Quakers who live in Germantown, near Philadelphia, have done so as a group. For this piece of information Hepburn gives as his authority one of the German Quakers themselves. He makes no reference to their now famous protest of 1688. Here and in other matters he supplements our knowledge in a very welcome way.⁶³ There is, for example, little reference in Quaker

⁶² Cf. Kirby, *op. cit.*, pp. 72 ff. Gabriel Thomas, *An Historical and Geographical Account of . . . Pennsylvania and of West-New-Jersey*, London, 1698, p. 53, says of the earlier Keith: "He gave a strict charge . . . that they should not be concerned in the compelling part of the worldly government."

⁶³ For the freedom from slave holding among the Pennsylvania Germans see E. R. Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 1911, especially p. 68, note 13. Hepburn's statement is earlier and more explicit than the evidence known to Turner. Hildegard Binder-Johnson, one of the very few modern writers to use Hepburn, in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 65 [1941], pp. 153 ff. indicates his bearing on the attitude of the Germans to slavery, which she thinks was a non-religious, national aversion to it.

records to the tests of Quaker pacifism in the crisis of a war against the French in 1692 and 1711.⁶⁴ Except for those of Woodbridge Men's Monthly Meeting and Shrewsbury Women's Monthly Meeting and Shrewsbury Quarterly Meeting (after 1705) the records of East Jersey Quakerism at the period are not extant. In 1738 Woodbridge Monthly Meeting reported that its members had for three or four years been free of importing Negroes or buying those imported.⁶⁵ This was in answer to the pressure of opinion from the central Yearly Meeting. There is of course neither here nor elsewhere concrete evidence of the influence of Hepburn's book.

⁶⁴ In the absence of Quaker records on the subject I may cite the evidence from the journal of the Governor and Council that as early as 1682/3 a bill was proposed for exempting from militia duty those conscientiously opposed (*New Jersey Archives*, vol. 13, p. 35. Cf. Leaming and Spicer, *op. cit.*, pp. 157, 287) and that in 1713/4 on petition the goods distrained during Lord Cornbury's government (1702-1710) from certain Quakers who could not for conscience sake take up arms were ordered returned (*New Jersey Archives*, vol. 13, p. 546). The minutes of Woodbridge Monthly Meeting (copy at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania) give the form of an act of Assembly exempting from penalties those who do not [en]list if they produce a form signed by six members of the monthly meeting saying that they are Friends. A later minute shows that at least one member violently protested against any Friends who give or receive such certificates.

⁶⁵ MS minutes for June 17, 1738, cited by Joseph W. Dally, *Woodbridge and Vicinity*, New Brunswick, 1873, p. 73.

THE
American Defence
Of The
Christian Golden Rule,
Or
An Essay to prove the Unlawful-
ness of making *Slaves* of *Men*.

*By him who Loves the Freedom of the Souls
and Bodies of All Men,*

John Hepburn.

Printed ~~in the~~ Year 1715.

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