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978-1-107-62596-9 - Peter Sterry Platonist and Puritan 1613–1672: A Biographical and
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Vivian De Sola Pinto

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PETER STERRY
PLATONIST AND PURITAN

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 Christ alone: O My Brother w^t a Palace
 is hee: what a Guest: w^t a full Glory, and
 Entertainment. How neare, & how true a
 Solfe: How deare, how sweete a Life.
 I know nothing pleasanter, than that which
 David sung to God: Thy Statutes are my Songs
 in \mathcal{E} house of my Pilgrimage. Even in this
 earthly body, \mathcal{E} manifestations of \mathcal{E} Love, &
 beauty, & fullnes of \mathcal{E} Godhead in \mathcal{E} Person
 of Christ, w^t are \mathcal{E} Statutes of God in the
 truest Songs, are Songs, harmony, Musick made
 by \mathcal{E} heavenly Sphaeres of \mathcal{E} Divine Beings
 themselves in us, by \mathcal{E} Charms of w^t even
 our house, our Pilgrimage, & all things in it
 are turned into heavenly Dances, & Delights.
 Let us keepe then this Mystery of our faith
 in a good conscience, like shining precious
 stones in a case of pure Crisall, w^t throu
 it sends forth its rare vertues to carry us
 to our Kingdome with a glorious supply of
 all our wants in \mathcal{E} way. While we are
 here let us see \mathcal{E} faces of each other in

Specimen of Peter Sterry's handwriting, consisting of a page of MS. Book II, containing part of a holograph transcript of a letter to his brother (see p. 178)

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PETER STERRY
PLATONIST AND PURITAN
1613–1672

*A Biographical and Critical Study with
passages selected from his Writings*

BY

VIVIAN DE SOLA PINTO

M.A., D.PHIL. OXON.

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It is long since I heard much of the name and fame of Mr *Peter Sterry*, long chaplain to *Robert Lord Brooke*, and after to *Oliver Cromwel* when he was *Protector* (as then called). His common fame was, that his Preaching was such as none or few could understand: which incensed my desire to have heard him, of which I still mist, though I oft attempted it. But now since his death, while my Book is in the Press unfinished, a posthumous tractate of his cometh forth of *Free-will*: upon perusal of which I find in him the same notions (for so far as he meddleth with the same subjects) as in Sr *H. Vane*; and somewhat of what Dr *Gibbon* seemeth to deliver in his Scheme; but all handled with much more *strength* of *parts* and *raptures* of highest *devotion*, and great *candour* towards all others, than I expected. His Preface is a most excellent Perswasive to Universal Charity: Love was never more extolled than throughout his Book. Doubtless his head was strong, his wit admirably pregnant, his searching studies hard and sublime, and, I think, his heart replenished with holy Love to God, and great charity, moderation, and peaceableness towards men: In so much that I heartily repent that I so far believed fame as to think somewhat hardlier or less charitably of him and his few adherents than I now hope they did deserve. *Hasty judging*, and *believing fame* is a cause of unspeakable hurt to the world, and injury to our brethren. But I find it is no wonder that he was understood by few, For his sublime and philosophical notions, met not with many Auditors, so well studied in those things as to be capable of understanding them. It is a great inconvenience to men of extraordinary discoveries and sublimity, that they must speak to very few.

RICHARD BAXTER

Catholicke Theologie...London...1675. The Second Part, p. 107

There was a man in his [Henry More's] time who deserves to be remembered both as a mystic and a very profound thinker; one who had many of the qualities of Tauler and Böhme, and yet who belonged emphatically to his own age... Peter Sterry... is one of those men into whose writings few have looked seriously without carrying away some impressions which they would be very sorry to lose... The Reader may be utterly lost in the wealth of Sterry's thoughts and imaginations; he will seldom have to complain of poverty or barrenness... Sterry is little read... but a better knowledge of him would often throw light upon the work of his contemporaries, and would enable us to prize them more.

F. D. MAURICE

Modern Philosophy, 1862, pp. 350, 351

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PREFACE

Six years ago I was led to begin a study of the writings and of the life of Peter Sterry by reading the essay on him in Mr F. J. Powicke's *The Cambridge Platonists* and the article by Miss Charlotte Fell Smith in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. I was deeply impressed by the beauty of his style, and by the fine quality of his thought, and I was surprised that he had been so completely forgotten. I formed the plan of drawing the attention of modern readers to his work, and, after some consideration, came to the conclusion that the best way of presenting him to a modern audience would be by means of a book consisting of a biography and critical study forming an introduction to a selection of passages from his writings. I have not reprinted any of his sermons *in extenso*, as I considered that their elaborate scholastic structure with its numerous subdivisions would be a stumbling-block to the modern reader, and, as it was merely a traditional form which he had to use in official utterances, would add nothing to a true understanding of his genius. On the other hand, as I was anxious to give an example of a fairly long continuous piece of his prose, I have reprinted the whole of his admirable Preface to *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will* as the first of my selected passages. An anthology must always reflect personal taste and bear the mark of the age in which it is made, and I admit that I have chosen passages that are likely to appeal to the modern reader. My aim has been to exhibit not so much those aspects of Sterry's work that probably made the greatest impression on his contemporaries as those elements in it which appear to me to have the enduring and universal qualities of great literature, and which, I believe, truly represent what he himself regarded as the very pith of his doctrine. The form of the anthology was suggested to me by Mr L. Pearsall Smith's admirable selections from the

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sermons of Donne and of Jeremy Taylor, and I gladly take this opportunity of acknowledging my debt to those two golden little volumes. I have also followed Mr Pearsall Smith's example in giving my own titles to the extracts.

I have been unable to find an authentic portrait of Peter Sterry. The only one that exists seems to be a nineteenth-century stained glass window in the chapel of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and there is every reason to suppose that this is a wholly imaginary representation. I have therefore considered that the best frontispiece for this volume would be a reproduction of a specimen of his handwriting from the Sterry MSS.

I have been fortunate enough to receive most generous help and encouragement from living members of Peter Sterry's family, notably from Mrs E. Poolman of Melbourne, Australia, who has placed at my disposal her valuable collection of her ancestor's manuscripts (described on pp. 44–58 and 223–226) and the Sterry family papers, from Mrs Audrey S. Pacy, through whose courtesy I was able to find the manuscripts and to communicate with their owner, and from Sir Wasey Sterry, Kt., C.B.E., who has taken a most kind interest in my work, has lent me his unique copies of two of Sterry's printed sermons, and has put himself to great trouble in procuring for me valuable biographical and genealogical information.

I wish to make grateful acknowledgment of the fact that the expense of publishing this book has been met partly by the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, and partly by contributions from the Governing Body of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, from the Research Fund of University College, Southampton, and from Sir Wasey Sterry. I desire to thank the Research Committee of the Senate of University College, Southampton, also for voting several sums of money to defray expenses incidental to my work of research.

I am happy to be able to record my debt to members of my

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own family: to the patience and skill of my wife who has typewritten most of the extracts for me and has made the index, and to the generosity of my father, to whom, as an old admirer of Cromwell, I have dedicated this memorial of one of Cromwell's favourite chaplains. Professors Lascelles Abercrombie and Denis Saurat have taken a friendly interest in the undertaking almost from the beginning, and I have been greatly stimulated both by their conversation and their writings. Like all students of Platonism and mysticism I have often had recourse to the works of Dean Inge and Evelyn Underhill, and owe much to their learning and wisdom. My friend Mr E. H. Blakeney has given me valuable assistance in tracing allusions to classical authors, and Mr Herbert Loewe, to whom I was introduced by Dr C. G. Montefiore, has honoured me by presenting me with a learned note on an allusion to Rabbinical teaching to include in my commentary. I have to thank the Rev. F. E. Hutchinson and my colleague Mr J. B. Leishman for reading through the whole work and for making several useful suggestions which I have been glad to incorporate. I beg to acknowledge the kind permission granted to me by Messrs P. J. and A. E. Dobell to quote two stanzas from Thomas Traherne's poem *Hosanna*. Finally it is a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to the staff of the Cambridge University Press for their kindness, their courtesy and their skilful aid.

V. DE SOLA PINTO

*University College
Southampton
October 1933*