

CHAPTER I

¹ < > **T**HAT all may know the dealings of the Lord with me, and the various exercises, trials, and troubles through which he led me in order to prepare and fit me for the work unto which he had appointed me, and may thereby be drawn to admire and glorify his infinite wisdom and goodness, I think fit (before I proceed to set forth my public travels in the service of Truth), briefly to mention how it was with me in my youth, and how the work of the Lord was begun and gradually carried on in me, even from my childhood.

I was born in the month called July in the year 1624, at Drayton-in-the-Clay² in Leicestershire. My father's name was Christopher Fox; he was by profession a weaver, an honest man, and there was a Seed of God in him. The neighbours called him 'Righteous Christer'. My mother was an upright woman; her maiden name was Mary Lago, of the family of the Lagos and of the stock of the martyrs.

In my very young years I had a gravity and stayedness of mind and spirit not usual in children, insomuch that, when I have seen old men carry themselves lightly and wantonly towards each other, I have had a dislike thereof risen in my heart, and have said within myself, 'If ever I come to be a man, surely I should not do so nor be so wanton.'

When I came to eleven years of age, I knew pureness and righteousness; for while I was a child I was taught how to walk to be kept pure. The Lord taught me to be

¹ < > These brackets indicate matter taken from the first (Ellwood's) edition, 1694. The various sources are explained in the editorial preface. The passage here begun ends on p. 20.

² Now Fenny Drayton.

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faithful in all things, and to act faithfully two ways, viz. inwardly to God and outwardly to man, and to keep to 'yea' and 'nay' in all things. For the Lord showed me that though the people of the world have mouths full of deceit and changeable words, yet I was to keep to 'yea' and 'nay' in all things; and that my words should be few and savoury, seasoned with grace; and that I might not eat and drink to make myself wanton but for health, using the creatures in their service, as servants in their places, to the glory of him that hath created them; they being in their covenant, and I being brought up into the covenant, as sanctified by the Word which was in the beginning, by which all things are upheld; wherein is unity with the creation.

But people being strangers to the covenant of life with God, they eat and drink to make themselves wanton with the creatures, devouring them upon their own lusts, and living in all filthiness, loving foul ways and devouring the creation; and all this in the world, in the pollutions thereof, without God; and therefore I was to shun all such.

Afterwards, as I grew up, my relations thought to have me a priest,¹ but others persuaded to the contrary; whereupon I was put to a man,² a shoemaker by trade, and that dealt in wool, and used grazing, and sold cattle; and a great deal went through my hands. While I was with him, he was blessed; but after I left him he broke, and came to nothing. I never wronged man or woman in all that time, for the Lord's power was with me and over me, to preserve me. While I was in that service, I used in my dealings the word 'verily', and it was a common saying among people that knew me, 'If George says "Verily" there is no altering him.' When boys and rude people would laugh at me, I let them alone and went my way, but people had generally a love to me for my innocency and honesty.

When I came towards nineteen years of age, I being

¹ Fox applied the term priest to all professional preachers, ministers and clergy, irrespective of the particular sect to which they belonged.

² Probably George Gee of Mancetter, a neighbouring village.

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upon business at a fair,¹ one of my cousins, whose name was Bradford, being a professor² and having another professor with him, came to me and asked me to drink part of a jug of beer with them, and I, being thirsty, went in with them, for I loved any that had a sense of good, or that did seek after the Lord. And when we had drunk a glass apiece, they began to drink healths and called for more drink, agreeing together that he that would not drink should pay all. I was grieved that any that made profession of religion should offer to do so. They grieved me very much, having never had such a thing put to me before by any sort of people; wherefore I rose up to be gone, and putting my hand into my pocket I took out a groat and laid it down upon the table before them and said, ‘If it be so, I’ll leave you.’ So I went away; and when I had done what business I had to do, I returned home, but did not go to bed that night, nor could not sleep, but sometimes walked up and down, and sometimes prayed and cried to the Lord, who said unto me, ‘Thou seest how young people go together into vanity and old people into the earth; and thou must forsake all, both young and old, and keep out of all, and be as a stranger unto all.’

Then, at the command of God, on the 9th day of the Seventh Month [September],³ 1643, I left my relations and brake off all familiarity or fellowship with young or old. And I passed to Lutterworth, where I stayed some time; and from thence I went to Northampton, where also I made some stay, then passed from thence to Newport Pagnall in Buckinghamshire, where, after I had stayed awhile, I went unto Barnet, and came thither in the Fourth Month, called June, in the year 1644. And as I thus travelled through the countries,⁴ professors took notice

¹ At Atherstone, near Drayton.

² That is, one who makes profession of religious faith.

³ It is to be noted in reading dates in these pages that, previous to the reform of the Calendar in 1752, March was the First Month of the year.

⁴ Fox uses *country* both in its indefinite sense and instead of *county*.

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of me and sought to be acquainted with me, but I was afraid of them for I was sensible they did not possess what they professed.

Now during the time that I was at Barnet a strong temptation to despair came upon me. And then I saw how Christ was tempted, and mighty troubles I was in. And sometimes I kept myself retired in my chamber, and often walked solitary in the Chase there, to wait upon the Lord. And I wondered why these things should come to me; and I looked upon myself and said, 'Was I ever so before?' Then I thought, because I had forsaken my relations I had done amiss against them; so I was brought to call to mind all my time that I had spent and to consider whether I had wronged any. But temptations grew more and more and I was tempted almost to despair, and when Satan could not effect his design upon me that way, then he laid snares for me and baits to draw me to commit some sin, whereby he might take advantage to bring me to despair. I was about twenty years of age when these exercises came upon me, and some years I continued in that condition, in great trouble; and fain I would have put it from me. And I went to many a priest to look for comfort but found no comfort from them.

From Barnet I went to London, where I took a lodging, and was under great misery and trouble there, for I looked upon the great professors of the city of London, and I saw all was dark and under the chain of darkness. And I had an uncle there, one Pickering, a Baptist (and they were tender then), yet I could not impart my mind to him nor join with them, for I saw all, young and old, where they were. Some tender people would have had me stay, but I was fearful, and returned homewards into Leicestershire again, having a regard upon my mind unto my parents and relations, lest I should grieve them, who, I understood, were troubled at my absence.

When I was come down into Leicestershire, my relations would have had me married, but I told them I was but a lad, and I must get wisdom. Others would have had me

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into the auxiliary band among the soldiery, but I refused; and I was grieved that they proffered such things to me, being a tender youth. Then I went to Coventry, where I took a chamber for a while at a professor’s house till people began to be acquainted with me, for there were many tender people in that town.

And after some time I went into my own country again, and was there about a year, in great sorrows and troubles, and walked many nights by myself. Then the priest of Drayton, the town of my birth, whose name was Nathaniel Stephens, would come often to me, and I went often to him, and another priest sometimes would come with him; and they would have given place to me to hear me, and I would ask them questions and reason with them. And this priest Stephens asked me a question, why Christ cried out upon the Cross, ‘ My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me ? ’ and why he said, ‘ If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but thine be done ’ ? And I told him at that time the sins of all mankind were upon him, and their iniquities and transgressions with which he was wounded, which he was to bear, and to be an offering for them as he was man, but died not as he was God; and so, in that he died for all men, and tasted death for every man, he was an offering for the sins of the whole world. This I spoke, being at that time in a measure sensible of Christ’s sufferings, and what he went through. And the priest said it was a very good, full answer, and such an one as he had not heard. And at that time he would applaud and speak highly of me to others; and what I said in discourse to him on the week-days that he would preach of on the First-days, for which I did not like him. And this priest afterwards became my great persecutor.

After this I went to another ancient priest¹ at Mancetter in Warwickshire and reasoned with him about the ground of despair and temptations, but he was ignorant of my condition; and he bid me take tobacco and sing psalms.

¹ Richard Abel.

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Tobacco was a thing I did not love and psalms I was not in an estate to sing; I could not sing. Then he bid me come again and he would tell me many things, but when I came again he was angry and pettish, for my former words had displeased him. And he told my troubles and sorrows and griefs to his servants, so that it got among the milk-lasses, which grieved me that I should open my mind to such an one. I saw they were all miserable comforters; and this brought my troubles more upon me.

Then I heard of a priest living about Tamworth, who was accounted an experienced man, and I went seven miles to him; but I found him but like an empty, hollow cask. Then I heard of one called Doctor Cradock, of Coventry, and I went to him, and I asked him the ground of temptations and despair and how troubles came to be wrought in man. He asked me who were Christ's father and mother. I told him Mary was his mother, and that he was supposed to be the son of Joseph, but he was the Son of God. Now, as we were talking together in his garden, the alley being narrow, I chanced, in turning, to set my foot on the side of a bed, at which the man was in such a rage as if his house had been on fire. And thus all our discourse was lost, and I went away in sorrow, worse than I was when I came. I thought them miserable comforters, and I saw they were all as nothing to me, for they could not reach my condition.

After this I went to another, one Macham,¹ a priest in high account. And he would needs give me some physic and I was to have been let blood, but they could not get one drop of blood from me, either in arms or head, though they endeavoured it, my body being, as it were, dried up with sorrows, grief, and troubles, which were so great upon me that I could have wished I had never been born to see vanity and wickedness, or that I had been born blind, that I might never have seen wickedness nor vanity, and deaf, that I might never have heard vain and wicked words, or the Lord's name blasphemed.

¹ John Machin, Lecturer at Atherstone.

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And when the time called Christmas came, while others were feasting and sporting themselves, I would have gone and looked out poor widows from house to house, and have given them some money. And when I was invited to marriages, as I sometimes was, I would go to none at all, but the next day, or soon after, I would go and visit them, and if they were poor, I gave them some money; for I had wherewith both to keep myself from being chargeable to others, and to administer something to the necessities of others.

About the beginning of the year 1646, as I was going to Coventry, and entering towards the gate, a consideration arose in me, how it was said that all Christians are believers, both Protestants and Papists; and the Lord opened to me that, if all were believers, then they were all born of God and passed from death to life, and that none were true believers but such; and though others said they were believers, yet they were not. At another time, as I was walking in a field on a First-day morning, the Lord opened unto me that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ; and I stranged¹ at it because it was the common belief of people. But I saw clearly, as the Lord opened it to me, and was satisfied, and admired the goodness of the Lord who had opened this thing unto me that morning, which struck at Priest Stephens’s ministry, namely, that to be bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to make a man fit to be a minister of Christ. So that which opened in me, I saw, struck at the priest’s ministry.

But my relations were much troubled at me that I would not go with them to hear the priest, for I would get into the orchard or the fields, with my Bible by myself. And I told them, ‘ Did not the apostle say to believers that they needed no man to teach them, but as the anointing teacheth them ? ’ And though they knew this was Scripture and that it was true, yet they would be grieved because I could not be subject in this matter to go to hear the priest with

¹ i.e. thought it strange.

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them. For I saw that a true believer was another thing than they looked upon it to be. And I saw that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge did not qualify or fit a man to be a minister of Christ; and what then should I follow such for? So neither them nor any of the Dissenting people could I join with, but was as a stranger to all, relying wholly upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

At another time it was opened in me that God, who made the world, did not dwell in temples made with hands. This, at the first, seemed a strange word because both priests and people use to call their temples or churches, dreadful places, and holy ground, and the temples of God. But the Lord showed me, so that I did see clearly, that he did not dwell in these temples which men had commanded and set up, but in people's hearts; for both Stephen and the Apostle Paul bore testimony that he did not dwell in temples made with hands, not even in that which he had once commanded to be built, since he put an end to it; but that his people were his temple, and he dwelt in them. This opened in me as I walked in the fields to my relations' house. And when I came there, they told me that Nathaniel Stephens the priest had been there, and told them he was afraid of me for going after new lights. And I smiled in myself, knowing what the Lord had opened in me concerning him and his brethren, but I told not my relations, who, though they saw beyond the priests, yet they went to hear them, and were grieved because I would not go also. But I brought them Scriptures, and told them there was an anointing within man to teach him, and that the Lord would teach his people himself. And I had great openings concerning the things written in the Revelations; and when I spoke of them, the priests and professors would say that was a sealed-up book, and would have kept me out of it, but I told them Christ could open the seals, and that they were the nearest things to us, for the Epistles were written to the saints that lived in former ages, but the Revelations were written of things to come.

After this, I met with a sort of people that held women

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have no souls, adding in a light manner, no more than a goose. But I reproved them and told them that was not right, for Mary said, ‘ My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.’

And removing again to another place, I came among a people that relied much on dreams. And I told them, except they could distinguish between dream and dream, they would mash or confound all together; for there were three sorts of dreams; for multitude of business sometimes caused dreams; and there were whisperings of Satan in man in the night-season; and there were speakings of God to man in dreams. But these people came out of these things, and at last became Friends.

Now though I had great openings, yet great trouble and temptation came many times upon me, so that when it was day I wished for night, and when it was night I wished for day; and by reason of the openings I had in my troubles, I could say as David said, ‘ Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge.’ And when I had openings, they answered one another and answered the Scriptures, for I had great openings of the Scriptures; and when I was in troubles, one trouble also answered to another.

About the beginning of the year 1647, I was moved of the Lord to go into Derbyshire, where I met with some friendly people, and had many discourses with them. Then passing further into the Peak country, I met with more friendly people, and with some in empty, high notions. And travelling on through some parts of Leicestershire and into Nottinghamshire, there I met with a tender people, and a very tender woman whose name was Elizabeth Hooton; and with these I had some meetings and discourses. But my troubles continued, and I was often under great temptations; and I fasted much, and walked abroad in solitary places many days, and often took my Bible and went and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places till night came on; and frequently in the night walked mournfully about by myself, for I was a man of

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sorrows in the times of the first workings of the Lord
in me.

Now during all this time I was never joined in profession of religion with any, but gave up myself to the Lord, having forsaken all evil company, and taken leave of father and mother and all other relations, and travelled up and down as a stranger in the earth, which way the Lord inclined my heart, taking a chamber to myself in the town where I came, and tarrying sometimes a month, sometimes more, sometimes less in a place. For I durst not stay long in any place, being afraid both of professor and profane, lest, being a tender young man, I should be hurt by conversing much with either. For which reason I kept myself much as a stranger, seeking heavenly wisdom and getting knowledge from the Lord, and was brought off from outward things to rely wholly on the Lord alone. And though my exercises and troubles were very great, yet were they not so continual but that I had some intermissions, and was sometimes brought into such an heavenly joy that I thought I had been in Abraham's bosom. As I cannot declare the misery I was in, it was so great and heavy upon me, so neither can I set forth the mercies of God unto me in all my misery. Oh, the everlasting love of God to my soul when I was in great distress! When my troubles and torments were great, then was his love exceeding great. Thou, Lord, makest a fruitful field a barren wilderness, and a barren wilderness a fruitful field; thou bringest down and settest up; thou killest and makest alive; all honour and glory be to thee, O Lord of glory! The knowledge of thee in the spirit is life, but that knowledge which is fleshly works death. And while there is this knowledge in the flesh, deceit and self-will conform to anything, and will say, 'Yes, yes', to that it doth not know. The knowledge which the world hath of what the prophets and apostles spake is a fleshly knowledge; and the apostates from the life in which the prophets and apostles were, have gotten their words, the Holy Scriptures, in a form, but not in their life nor spirit that gave them