

JACOB BOEHME AND THE EARLY QUAKERS

At the London Morning Meeting held at the widow Rebecca Travers's house at the sign of the 'Three Feathers' in Watling Street on 21 September 1674 an 'Epistle to the Behmenists' by Ralph Fretwell (*d.* 1686) of Barbados was presented and read. Having weighed it in the 'Fear of God' and in 'tender care of his Truth' it was decided that it should not be printed:

we know the spirit in which Jacob Behmen wrote many of his writings was not clear, but he lived in a great mixture of light & darkness, as to his understanding & sometimes the power of the one prevailed & sometimes the power of the other, now the fruit of the one is judged in the day of God, and the other comes to its own center and flows forth again more purely.

Fretwell, formerly one of the chief judges of the Court of Common Pleas on the island, had once received 'Light and power' from 'Infants Baptism', 'Bread, & wine' and the 'Pater Noster'. As Quakers denied the validity of the sacraments, of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as well as the Lord's Prayer, it was deemed that the epistle gave too much encouragement to the 'Foxes' among the Behmenists, who would continue with the 'dryness & Barrenness' of their ways rather than accepting the 'seed that opens the Mysteries of Gods Kingdom in themselves'.¹ Accordingly, following a request that a copy of Fretwell's book be sent to George Fox, the epistle was minuted in 1675 as 'not to be published', 'not suitable', 'not safe' and two Quaker printers warned against infringing these restrictions.²

Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) came from Alt-Seidenberg, a village near Görlitz, a city of about 10 000 inhabitants in Upper Lusatia. The son of devout Lutheran peasants, he progressed from shoemaker's apprentice to journeyman, later purchasing a cobbler's shop. About 1600 he was possessed with a '*Divine Light*' and going out into an open field beheld 'the *Wonder-workes* of the Creator in the Signatures of all created things, very clearly and manifestly laid open'.³ Between January and June 1612 Boehme made a fair copy of his celebrated '*Morgenröthe im Aufgang*' or '*Aurora*' (literally 'Morning Glow, Ascending'), a long unfinished work that had been at least twelve years in the making. Following the circulation of the manuscript and

the transcription of additional copies he was denounced by the city magistrates of Görlitz and then from the pulpit. Thereafter Boehme sold his cobbler's bench and began to engage in small-scale commerce, trading in yarns and woollen gloves. After an interval of some years he was said to have been stirred up by the Holy Spirit and, encouraged by the entreaties of certain people, took up his pen. He boasted that his writings were known to 'nearly all of Silesia', as well as in many places in Saxony and Meissen. Nonetheless, they remained unpublished until the printing of *Der Weg zu Christo* (Görlitz, c. 1624).⁴ Boehme's death served only to increase the aura surrounding his life and teachings. A legend began to take shape of a simple, pious barely literate artisan who was given the gift of 'Universall knowledge' and shown:

the Centre of all Beings; how all things arise from God Originally; consist in God, and againe returne.⁵

The Silesian nobleman Abraham von Franckenberg (1593-1652) praise his 'profound' and 'deep-grounded' writings, believing that they hinted at the great wonders God would perform in future generations. Indeed, in his last years some of Boehme's followers began calling him 'Teutonicus Philosophus', regarding him as a prophet of the Thirty Years' War.⁶

Between 1645 and 1662 most of Boehme's treatises and the majority of his letters were printed in English translation at London. The question of their influence on the early Quakers and the reasons why many Friends eventually repudiated them has been long debated. In a paper on the origin of the Muggletonians published in 1869 Alexander Gordon claimed not only that the first Quakers 'pondered and cherished' Boehme's writings, but even that 'the Quaker spirit and the spirit of Behmen were one'. In the same vein, Christopher Walton compared an obscure passage in Fox's *Journal* with Boehme's stated spiritual experiences to show that Fox was conversant with them.⁷ Yet it was in *The Life of John Milton* (1859-94) that David Masson first maintained that the Quakers 'shared substantially' with the Behmenists and other continental mystics their doctrines of the 'universality of the gift of the Spirit, and of the constant inner light, and motion, and teaching of the Spirit in the soul of each individual believer'. Eduard Bernstein reiterated the point: the 'cult of the inward light, down to the very name "Children of Light", forms a connecting-link between the Quakers and many

German Anabaptists, as also the German mystics'.⁸ William Braithwaite also supposed that the influence of Boehme's writing was probably considerable, observing that the resemblance between his teachings and those of Friends did not escape contemporary commentators. In *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1914) Rufus Jones explored the issue in greater depth than his predecessors, asserting that there could be no question that Boehme's works were read by the 'serious Seekers in the period of the Commonwealth'. Indeed, he felt that there were 'so many' marks of the Teutonic Philosopher's influence apparent in Fox's *Journal* that no careful students of the two could doubt that there was 'some sort of influence, direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious'.⁹ Similarly, Margaret Bailey argued that 'a persistent stream of mystical opinion and literature' emanating from the 'nurseries of freedom' in Holland was the source of the 'animating ideas of Anabaptists, Familists, Seekers, Quakers, and many other sects'. She suggested, moreover, that the 'final merging' of the Behmenists, as well as of the Familists and the Seekers, with the Quakers, was brought about by the 'dominating personality and constructive genius' of George Fox.¹⁰

That some Quakers had undoubtedly been attracted by Behmenism was subsequently reaffirmed, though with the caveat that while some Behmenists were ultimately absorbed into the Quaker movement not all Quakers were attracted by the German mystic.¹¹ Reginald Maxse's unpublished dissertation 'The reception of Jacob Boehme in England in the XVII and XVIII centuries (Oxford B. Litt., 1934) also suggested that there were important points of contact between Quakers and Behmenists, such as 'the dominating conception of Christ as the Inner Light and the necessity for the Christian to attain by penitence a new birth of the Divine "seed", that state in which Adam was before the Fall'.¹² There followed Wilhelm Struck's *Der Einfluss Jakob Böhmes auf die englische Literatur des 17 Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1936), which remains the fullest treatment of the subject.¹³ Struck, however, was criticized by Stephen Hobhouse for producing almost no new evidence and citing passages by Quaker authors that sounded like Boehme. In addition, he noted that 'natural mystical metaphors, such as those of the inner light, the living seed, the holy birth, the divine pearl, have clearly a much older and wider history'. Thus Hobhouse explained their occurrence in different writers 'simply through the independent study by kindred minds of texts of the Bible'.¹⁴ Equally cautious was Winthrop Hudson, who insisted that many of the parallels between Boehme and Fox adduced

by Rufus Jones seemed rather 'exaggerated and overdrawn'. Instead he emphasized the importance of English interpreters of the Spiritualist reformer Sebastian Franck (1499-1542).¹⁵ This trend in minimizing Boehme's significance reached its apogee with Geoffrey Nuttall's *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (1947). Nuttall contended that Quakerism grew out of 'the soul and climate of the time' and that while much in radical Puritanism was in sympathy with Quaker practice, there was something in Quakerism contrary even to the Puritans' beliefs.¹⁶ Furthermore, by stressing that the passage of individuals 'through the whole gamut' of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Quakers was 'over and over again' in the one direction and almost never the other, he could suggest that early Quakerism indicated (rightly or wrongly) the direction of the Puritan movement as a whole. Quakerism was therefore explained as the product of English contexts - a 'spiritual climate', and studies of Quaker origins against a largely continental background of Anabaptism, spiritualism and mysticism dismissed as primarily of academic interest.¹⁷

Consequently, within the framework of this greater debate Boehme's influence upon the Quakers was declared 'specious'. Yet as Jackson Cope noticed, Nuttall rejected the influence of Boehme 'more sweepingly' than his evidence seemed to justify.¹⁸ Indeed, Henry Cadbury's work on early Quakerism and uncanonical lore increased awareness of the scope of Quaker reading and the range of possible influences. Perhaps Nuttall recognized this when in a fresh approach to James Nayler he explored the struggle between Familism and Apostolic Christianity that took place 'in the soul of infant Quakerism'. Firmly within this 'Familist' milieu were the Behmenists.¹⁹ In his study on *Enthusiasm* (Oxford, 1950), Ronald Knox again took up the question of Quaker origins, suggesting that aspects of Anabaptism clung to the 'atmosphere' of the early Friends while denying the possibility that Fox was drawn to Behmenism. Hugh Barbour added that many men were called Behmenists because their ideas resembled Boehme's though they had not studied his teachings.²⁰ In contrast, Christopher Hill stressed Fox's association with Durand Hotham, a Justice of the Peace who wrote a life of Boehme, as well as citing Richard Baxter and Lodowick Muggleton to illustrate his claim that Boehme had 'especially influenced the Quakers'.²¹ Attempting to resolve this apparent impasse, Barry Reay argued in *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (Hounslow, 1985) that historians had spilt 'unnecessary ink discussing the relative influences of radical Puritanism and

continental mysticism' upon early Quakerism. In his opinion the Quakers 'seem to have drawn on both traditions'.²² A different approach was taken by Hugh Ormsby-Lennon, who compared Quaker plain style with Boehme's vision of the language of nature: the signature of all things, wherein man may learn to know himself and the hidden spirit of all creatures.²³ Brian Gibbons also pointed out that 'the radicals most widely associated with Behmenism in the seventeenth century were the Quakers'. While admitting that none of his evidence was new, he nonetheless remarked that almost all of it spoke of Quaker hostility to Boehme rather than admiration:

Quakers generally remember an interest in Boehme's works as a folly of their youth, or they cite him as a dangerous advocate of sacraments. This hostility was reciprocated by the Behmenists, who attacked the quakers for their affectations and for the formalism of their rejection of religious forms²⁴

As all researchers are only too well aware, there is a real problem of what evidence does and does not say - and how far one can push it to make a point. In re-examining the early Quakers' attitude towards Boehme this article uses sources in manuscript and print ranging from antagonistic witnesses such as Baxter and Muggleton to the testimony of Friends like Hilary Prache. It demonstrates how polemicists provided Quakers with a genealogy linking them to Paracelsians, Behmenists and Familists and then outlines the manner in which Boehme's Quaker readers responded. The suggestion is that both their engagement with his writings and their association in contemporaries' minds with his teachings was more extensive than has hitherto usually been acknowledged. Moreover, this study will reopen the larger debate on the origins of Quakerism as well as reassessing the extent to which several Quaker leaders were able to transform their followers into an organized, disciplined, doctrinally coherent group. Indeed, as with problematic sectarian labels such as 'Seeker' and 'Ranter', it illustrates the initial lack of consensus - whether through ignorance, confusion, misinformation or deliberate distortion - as to what was understood by the pejorative name 'Quaker' beyond the notion that adherents trembled before the presence of God. The early Quakers' relationship with Boehme's writings is therefore a crucial aspect in understanding the formation of their individual identities and that of the movement as a whole.

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According to a lampoon entitled *The character of a Quaker in his true and proper colours* (1671), some traced the 'obscure' origins of the

Quakers to 'Behmen the canting Philosophaster of Germany'.²⁵ These genealogies emphasized correspondences between Boehme's neologisms and Quaker speech, as well as perceived similarities in doctrine. Thus Ralph Farmer of Bristol accused Quakers of taking their 'canting language' from Boehme, quoting 'the straying of Eves minde and lust into the visibles' and 'being redeemed out of the perishing nature' as examples.²⁶ Likewise, the nonconformist minister John Faldo cited several 'newcoyn'd' Quaker phrases of a 'peculiar Mintage' such as 'Miracles in Spirit' and 'The Seed in captivity', which he claimed derived from Boehme.²⁷ In the same vein, Thomas Comber a future dean of Durham hinted that Quakers daily repaired to 'Jacob Behmen's Theosophick School of Pentecost', remarking that Boehme's notion of the 'Signature opened by the Spirit' resembled the Quakers' 'Seed or Birth which is the Susceptive Principle, conveying Inspiration from God into the Soul'.²⁸ John Brown, moreover, an exiled Scottish minister living in Rotterdam tried to show in *Quakerisme the path-way to paganisme* (Edinburgh, 1678) how they 'joine with Iacob Behme', who 'sliighted the imputed righteousness from without, and magnified the little spark within, whereby the Father draweth them all to Christ, and teacheth all within them'.²⁹ This linkage proved difficult to break for in a letter of 1748 addressed to a recent Quaker convert John Wesley (1703-1791) noted that the uncommon expression, "'This holy birth brought forth'" was taken from Boehme, as indeed were 'many other' expressions used by the Quakers. Wesley also suggested that Robert Barclay's unusual phrases "'Ceasing from all outwards, in the natural will and comprehension, and feeling after the inward seed of life'" were borrowed from Boehme.³⁰

Among the first known authors to explicitly associate the Quakers with Boehme was the Presbyterian minister Richard Baxter (1615-1691), who insisted that Boehme took his doctrine neither from Scripture nor from angels, but from the Spiritualist reformer Valentin Weigel (1533-1588) and especially that 'drunken conjurer' and physician Paracelsus (1493-1541). Baxter thought that Boehme largely wrote nonsense fit for pudding brains. Indeed, he asserted that Boehme maintained a 'multitude' of 'vile' falsehoods contrary to the Spirit of God.³¹ Baxter developed these opinions in *The Vnreasonableness of Infidelity* (1655), where he condemned Boehme's admirers for being duped by the 'cloudy nonsense' and 'wilful obscurity' of his 'enigmatical expressions'. Furthermore, by likening Boehme's 'ridiculous' language to the 'hideous bombardical' words

used by Basilides (fl.135) and Valentinus (c.100-175), Baxter reaffirmed the message of 'Theophrastia Valentiniana' (1637) by Abraham von Franckenberg, which emphasized correspondences between the teachings of the ancient Gnostics and the heirs of Paracelsus.³² In the same way Baxter linked the Quakers to their 'German Brethren' the Paracelsians and Behmenists, believing that with their forerunners - 'Seekers, Ranters, and Anabaptists' - they were part of a Popish confederacy let loose by the Devil.³³ Hence in *The Quakers Catchism* (1655) he recounted the 'abundance' of Popery that the Quakers and Behmenists maintained:

As that the Pope is not Antichrist ... and the disgracing and secret undermining the sufficiency of the Scripture, the decrying of the Ministry, the unchurching of our Churches the slighting of Justification by Imputed Righteousnesse, and drawing men to the admiration of their inherent righteousnesse, and of their works, the crying up the light within us, and the sufficiency of common revelation, the setting up the strength of mans free-will, the asserting the necessity of a Judge of Controversie above Scripture ... the extolling of a Monasticall Community and Virginity, and alienation from worldly employments, the doctrine of Perfection without sinne in this life, with many more of the like nature.³⁴

Writing to Morgan Llwyd (1619-1659) of Gwynedd on 10 July 1656, Baxter explained privately why he condemned the Quakers; they seemed to deny much of the Scriptures, attempted to destroy the ministry and came in a spirit of 'malice & revilinge'. In addition, he replied to Llwyd's contention that none knew the 'first and second' will of God before the 'revealed essence':

For ye hints you give of ye (revealed im[m]anent essence & ye two wills of God & c.) I must confess to you I can[n]ot understand your meaning without more words or light. Sr I'll deale plainly with you! I have met with one learned man y^t said somewhat towards a change upon my mind, & I have lately read Sr Hen[ry] Vanes booke, & lookt into some of Behmens; but they all deny satisfaction to my Understandinge, by two miscarriges w^{ch} they are com[m]only guilty of: The first is y^t they purposely & willfully hide their minds, deliveringe most things in Allegoryes (even when they speak in Scripture phrase) & avoydinge plaine & p[ro]p[er] terms. No man is so great an enemy to truth as he y^t obscureth it ... The 2^d Err[or] is

y^t they will not open to me y^e whole fabricke & systeme or body of truths w^{ch} they p[ro]fess to have attained: but will only drop here one & there one, that I may receive y^m by degrees.³⁵

In the tradition of anti-heretical writing going back to Epiphanius of Salamis (c.315-403), Baxter set about identifying and categorizing perceived errors, lumping together adherents of various individuals' teachings into distinct sects. He imagined that a grand Popish design had been undertaken by a sort of 'Juglers', who in the 'dark' and with 'wonderful' secrecy had concealed the principal part of their opinions by assuming several outward 'shapes and names'. Baxter termed them 'Hiders' and categorized them accordingly: the 'Vani' (followers of Sir Henry Vane); 'Paracelsians, Weigelians, and Behmenists' - who took their mask from Jacob Boehme; and 'Seekers'.³⁶ When he came to write a narrative of the most memorable events during his own lifetime Baxter identified at least five sects that had sprung up since the Presbyterians had been purged from Parliament and religious toleration given free rein. Though their doctrines were 'almost the same' they fell into several 'Shapes and Names':

1. The Vanists: 2. The Seekers: 3. The Ranters: 4. The Quakers: 5. The Behmenists.³⁷

Baxter represented the Quakers as but the 'Ranters turned from horrid Prophaneness and Blasphemy' to a life of extreme strictness, whose 'horrible Delusions' had most likely been fomented by the many Franciscan friars and other Papists who had infiltrated their meetings. The Behmenists' opinions he considered to go much towards the way of the Quakers, 'for the Sufficiency of the Light of Nature, the Salvation of Heathens as well as Christians, and a dependence on Revelations, & c.'. Yet he conceded that they were fewer in number and seemed to have attained to 'greater Meekness and conquest of Passions' than any of the other sects.³⁸ Elsewhere, Baxter continued to couple Behmenists with Quakers, depicting them as people who lived in great austerity and were against war.³⁹

The characterization of Boehme as a reincarnated Gnostic heretic whose fanciful mysticism had, through Jesuitical cunning, spawned a hidden sect that helped prepare the way for the Quaker movement was adopted, at least in part, by several hostile commentators. Thus Claudius Gilbert, minister of the garrison at Limerick, cited Baxter in *The Libertine School's, or a vindication of the Magistrates Power in*

Religious Matters (1657). Fearful of the dangers posed by those 'notorious Impostors' the Quakers who were carrying on the work of 'Seekers, Levellers, Arminians and Ranters' he warned that what Paracelsus, Boehme and others had attempted in Germany 'these expect now to perfect among us'. A 'pretended' Christ and light within would serve their turn to 'disgrace and destroy' Christ and light above, while Boehme's books so 'mysteriously monstrous' must be 'Englished for the Vulgar'.⁴⁰ Similarly, in *Hell broke loose* (1659) the Presbyterian stationer Thomas Underhill repeated Baxter's allegation that the 'soberer sort' of Quakers were possessed with the 'fancies of Jacob Bemon the German Paracelsian Prophet'.⁴¹ Likewise, the Presbyterian minister John Flavell reiterated Baxter's denunciation of Boehme's cloudy Nonsense, ænigmatical Expressions, and wilful Obscurity.⁴² Though Thomas Pierce a future dean of Salisbury challenged Baxter's inclusion of Sir Henry Vane among promoters of the 'Popish design', he too appears to have accepted that the Papists drew their strength in England from 'Seekers', 'Infidels', 'Quakers' and 'Behmenists'.⁴³ White Kennet, Bishop of Peterborough, also copied parts of Baxter's *A Word in Season. Or, The Great Plot For Restoring Popery* (1663), adopting his term 'Hiders' and counting Paracelsians, Weigelians, Behmenists and 'impudent' Quakers in the category.⁴⁴

While Baxter linked the Quakers to their 'German Brethren' the Paracelsians and Behmenists, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-1687) looked to Holland. In a letter dated 15 September 1670 to Anne, Viscountess Conway (1631-1679) at her country seat of Ragley Hall, Warwickshire he wrote that it would take too long to explain why the Quakers were 'descended' from Hendrik Niclaes (1502-c.1580), a merchant active in Amsterdam and Emden who in the 1540s had founded a hierarchical organization known as the Family of Love. Polemicists represented them as a mystical sect who allegorized the Scriptures and stressed the immanence of Christ. Moreover, they were rebuffed for seeking to attain perfectibility on earth, that is the process of spiritual regeneration whereby the believer returned to a prelapsarian state of oneness with God - or as it was known, of being 'Godded with God'. More believed that Familists had entered England through the wiles of Popish priests and their emissaries, for 'there will not be wanting illuminated elders of that Family in the Roman Church, pretended ones at least'.⁴⁵ In November 1675 Lady Conway was visited at Ragley by More's acquaintance, the Scottish Quaker George Keith (1638?-1716). Through conversation and reading their books she became less

prejudiced towards the Quakers, and on Keith's departure wrote to More:

I hope we may believe the account they give of themselves, that they never were infect'd with what you call Familisme, though perhaps some people amongst them may have expressed themselves in suspected termes out of ignorance.⁴⁶

Though he could not pronounce upon the 'generality of their Sect', More responded that Lady Conway was overconfident that from the beginning the Quakers had 'nothing to do with Familisme'. He cited the example of James Nayler as a 'demonstration' of how many Quakers had been 'tinctured with Familisme'. Furthermore, he had been informed in London by a purported associate of about twenty 'Familists' that they were 'downright' Quakers. Indeed, More confessed that he had always regarded Quakers as 'Familists onely armed with rudenesse and an obstinate Activity'. That the Quakers had 'emerged into a greater nearnesse to the true Apostolick Christianity' was a cause for good Christians to rejoice:

But that they are hardly come from all points of Familisme, is plaine or that they stick so much at the externall Mediation of our Savior and would have this Mediation of his performed within onely.⁴⁷

Lady Conway eventually converted to Quakerism in 1677. Significantly, when More had visited Ragley some years before he was said to have had his 'ears full of Behmenism'.⁴⁸

More acknowledged that though Boehme was a 'pious' and 'well-meaning' writer who had engendered sentiments of 'sincere Piety' in others, he remained an 'Enthusiast'. As one of his characters in *The Two Last Dialogues* (1668) explained, the 'invincible Obscurity' of the Teutonic Philosopher's writings would prevent him being 'over-popular', while his 'mistakes in his pretended Inspirations in matters of Philosophy ruine his Authority amongst the more knowing and sagacious sort of persons'. Furthermore, this speaker supposed that Boehme had been influenced by both Paracelsus and Nicolaes's writings, 'which being Enthusiasticall Authors fired his Melancholy into the like Enthusiastick elevations of spirit, and produced a Philosophy in which we all-over discover the foot-steps of *Paracelsianism* and *Familism*'.⁴⁹ Writing in June 1669 to Mrs. Elizabeth Foxcroft (1600-1679), Lady Conway's amanuensis and companion at

Ragley, More continued this comparison of Nicolaes with Boehme. Nicolaes he judged 'an Infidell or Pagan canting in Scripture phrases' who threatened to undermine the 'ancient Apostolick truth' of Christian religion. Boehme on the other hand, he considered to be 'farr the better person and to have more of God in him'.⁵⁰ More repeated his judgment in correspondence with Lady Conway. Nicolaes he dismissed as 'a meer Mock-Prophet' and not divinely inspired, while 'Honest Jacob is wholesome at the bottome though a philosopher but at randome'.⁵¹ About 1670, probably at Foxcroft's or perhaps Lady Conway's behest, More wrote a lengthy private epistle, afterwards published in Latin translation as *Philosophiæ teutonicæ censura* (1679), in which he discussed questions such as whether Boehme was inspired, whether he was mad and what his chief errors were. In addition, he touched on the connection between Familists and Quakers.⁵² Henry Hallywell's *An Account of Familism As it is Revived and Propagated by the Quakers* (1673) developed this argument, which was refuted by William Penn.

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The heresiarch Lodowick Muggleton (1609-1698) supposed that 'Jacob Behmont's Books were the chief Books that the Quakers bought', maintaining that the 'Principle or Foundations of their Religion' was to be found there.⁵³ The first mention of Boehme in his writings comes in a letter dated 29 March 1660 to Edward Fewterell, surgeon of Chesterfield. Challenging Fewterell's belief that man can resign his will to God, Muggleton asserted that Boehme had no personal God at all, not to resign his Will unto; but his God was an infinite, incomprehensible formless Spirit'.⁵⁴ Again, in a letter of 28 November 1661 to Ellen Sudbury of Nottingham, he claimed that Boehme was 'utterly ignorant' of the doctrine of the six principles, knowing nothing of the person and nature' of God, the Devil and angels. Yet Muggleton conceded that Boehme's 'philosophical light was above all Men that doth profess religion, until this Commission of the Spirit came forth'.⁵⁵ At Sudbury's request - and at the expense of her 'Society' of Beamonists mix'd with the Quakers' - Muggleton came to Nottingham in the summer of 1663 where, by his own account, several of the 'Beamonists People' disputed with him only for four to have the 'Sentence of Damnation to eternity upon them'.⁵⁶ Muggleton recalled that Sudbury's husband, Richard, was then 'wrapped up and entangled with Jacob Bemon's principles and disciples with a little smatch of the Quakers'. But to his 'everlasting peace' he would come to know the difference between Boehme's doctrine and that of the 'commission of the spirit'.⁵⁷ It seems that Ellen and Richard Sudbury had belonged to the so-called 'Proud Quakers' of

Nottingham, whose leader was Rice Jones (fl. 1650-1663). A former Baptist and army Captain, Jones had disputed with George Fox in the gaol at Derby and at Nottingham Castle. In her discussions with More on the supposed Familist antecedents of Quakerism, Lady Conway revealingly insisted that while Fox had known Jones 'he never was of his congregation nor agreed in opinion with him'.⁵⁸ While the possibility that Jones was influenced by Niclaes's teachings must remain open to question because none of his writings are known to have survived, it is noteworthy that in an undated letter to Jones, Muggleton claimed that during their controversy at Nottingham he had understood the principles of Jones's religion. According to Muggleton, these principles were founded upon Boehme's philosophy, 'which is to believe that God is an infinite Spirit without a Body'. He added that:

there is very little Difference betwixt the Bemonists and the Quakers, only the Quakers are a little more precise in their outward Lives, but for your Doctrine and theirs it is all one.⁵⁹

These statements accord with opinions expressed elsewhere by Muggleton, that the conception of God as an immortal, eternal being dwelling in spiritual form exercised a definitive influence in the formation of Quaker thought.⁶⁰ Though Muggleton's abhorrence of formless 'Spirits without Bodies', whether divine or angelic, impaired his ability to observe subtle doctrinal distinctions, he was right nonetheless to emphasize Boehme's Quaker readership.⁶¹

Between 1649 and 1662 Giles Calvert (1612-1663), publisher and bookseller at the sign of 'The Black-spread-Eagle' at the west end of St. Paul's cathedral in the parish of St. Gregory by St. Pauls's issued five titles by Boehme: *The epistles of Jacob Bohmen* (1649), *Signatura rerum* (1651), *Concerning the election of grace* (1655), *Aurora* (1656) and *The remainder of the books written by Jacob Behme* (1662). From 1653 Calvert began publishing Quaker writings. Soon Quakers entrusted him with forwarding their letters and this trust was reciprocated by loans that Calvert gave Quakers newly arrived in London. He attended a Quaker 'General Meeting' at Swannington, Leicestershire and accompanied George Fox to a London Quaker meeting. Afterwards Alexander Parker and James Nayler found him 'exceeding tender and loving towards us'. Calvert remained a 'Loving friend' of the Quakers throughout 1655, continuing to publish their writings, forward their letters and supply them with credit and printed books. In December 1656 he signed a petition for remitting the remaining part of Nayler's punishment and it should be

remembered that one of Nayler's followers was Calvert's sister, Martha A Simmonds (1624-1665), whose husband Thomas was to replace Calvert as the leading Quaker publisher.⁶² It is thus possible that Quakers wishing to read Boehme may have borrowed or purchased his books from Calvert.

Titles by Boehme are recorded in a number of libraries among them that of Benjamin Furlly (1636-1714), Quaker merchant of Rotterdam, author, translator and friend of John Locke. Furlly's library contained more than 4400 books including writings by Boehme in their original German as well a Dutch, English and French versions. The collection was sold at auction in October 1714 for 763*l.* 19*s.*, with Boehme's works fetching over 35*l.*⁶³

Boehme's Quaker readers responded sometimes with ambivalence, sometimes with enthusiasm and sometimes with hostility. William Bayly (d.1675), a former soldier, Baptist teacher and shipmaster of Poole, recalled that before becoming convinced by Fox in 1655 he heard of Boehme's books and began to read much in them, imagining he comprehended something. Yet this would not put his immortal soul at rest, 'which still lay in death and bondage by reason of transgression and sin'.⁶⁴ Thomas Taylor (c.1617-1682), an Oxford-educated licensed preacher and once curate of the chapel at Preston Patrick near Kendal, rebuked a Justice of the Peace in February 1660 for warning him of the 'confused Notions and great words' found in Boehme and such like 'frothy Scriblers'. He believed that those whose eyes were opened would apprehend in Boehme's writings 'a sweet unfolding of the Mystery of God, and of Christ'. Hence it may be significant that his brother Christopher Taylor (c.1614-1686) was described as an antinomian and has been linked with a Grindletonian community in Bingley, West Yorkshire.⁶⁵

For John Perrot (d.1665) an Irish Baptist who was convinced by Edward Burrough, imprisoned by the Inquisition in Rome and became a Quaker schismatic, the light of God became manifest at the Reformation and shone brightly through Boehme, but this was only the beginning of the divine work now reaching fruition with the impending day of judgement.⁶⁶ Francis Ellington (fl. 1640-1665) also looked forward to what would come to pass in these 'Northern Islands' in the year believed foretold by the 'Number of the Beast', 1666.⁶⁷ Convinced by William Dewsbury in 1654, Ellington had for more than fifteen years employed the poor of Wellingborough, Northampton and the surrounding area in carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving wool.⁶⁸ He was at Wellingborough when the Diggers

established a colony to farm the waste ground there and may have been one of the local landholders who gave them help.⁶⁹ Ellington interpreted Jeremiah's prediction that the Lord would bring the seed of Israel out of the north country as a prophecy of the coming of the Quakers (Jeremiah 23:8).⁷⁰ Remarkably for a Quaker, he also cited verses from the Apocrypha foretelling the suffering of the Lord's chosen people who 'shall be tryed as the Gold in the fire' (2 Esdras 16:70-76).⁷¹ He referred, moreover, to the astrologer William Lilly's *Monarchy or no Monarchy in England* (1651), interpreting it as foreseeing 'the Lord's People that should arise in this Nation'.⁷² In *Christian Information Concerning these Last times* (1664) Ellington gathered some 'prophetical Passages' out of *Mercurius Teutonicus, or A Christian information concerning the last Times* (1649) by that 'Faithful Servant' Jacob Boehme. He quoted from a political commentary on the progress of the Thirty Years' War written as a postscript to a letter addressed to Abraham von Franckenberg. This was an allegory which combined elements from prophecies ascribed to Merlin Ambrose and a Franciscan friar:

*An Eagle (viz. the Emperor of Germany) hath hatched young Lyons in his Nest, and brought them Prey, till they have grown great, hoping that they would agin bring their Prey to him; but they have forgotten that, and taken the Eagles nest, and pluck off his Feathers, and in unfaithfulness bit of his Claws, so he can fetch no more Prey, though he should starve for hunger.*⁷³

Having cited a prophecy derived from Ezekiel predicting the 'great overthrow of the Children of Babilon' at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, Ellington turned to an epistle at the end of Boehme's *The Way to Christ Discovered* (1648):

*A Lilly blossometh to you ye Northern Countries, if you destroy it not with the Sectarian contention of the Learned, then it will become a great Tree among you; but if you shall rather contend then to know the True God, then the Ray passeth by, and hiteth only some; and then afterwards you shall be forced to draw water for the thirst of your Souls, among strange Nations.*⁷⁴

Here the lily, a common motif in prophecies and which elsewhere in Boehme's writings was used as a metaphor in a reworking of the Song of Solomon, is identified with the Quakers who have become 'a great Tree' in England.⁷⁵

Robert Rich (d.1679) counted Boehme as one of many whose spirit should be remembered as 'Friends to the Bridegroom, who longed to see this day of the Son in Man'. A wealthy London merchant, follower of Nayler and opponent of Fox who emigrated to Barbados, Rich by his own account had read pieces tending to a 'Holy Life'. These included Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, Benet of Canfield's *The rule of perfection* and Nicholas of Cusa's *The Idiot* (1650), as well as many 'Divine Works' by Nicolaes, Boehme and others that were 'inspired of God, and spake of the second Coming of Christ in the Sanctified, and of that blessed Day which should attend his Appearance'.⁷⁶ William Smith (d.1673) of Besthorpe, Nottinghamshire was another apparently familiar with Boehme's writings. He was the author of *The Day-Spring from on high visiting the World* (1659), a work whose title was taken from Luke 1:78 and which echoed Boehme's *Aurora, That is, the Day-Spring, or dawning of the day in the Orient* (1656). Smith was also a correspondent of Muggleton, who claimed his knowledge of Boehme far exceeded that of George Fox.⁷⁷

About December 1651 Fox visited Durand Hotham (c. 1617-1691), a Justice of the Peace living at Hutton Cranswick in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Escorted by Captain Richard Pursglove, he went to 'Justice Hothams: a pretty tender man y^t had had some experiences of Gods workeinge in his hearte'. According to Fox's account they discoursed of 'ye thinges of God', Hotham saying privately that he had known the principle' of inner light for ten years and was glad that 'ye Lord did now publish it abroad to people'. The following Sunday evening, having preached after divine service at Cranswick in the morning and disrupted a sermon at a neighbouring parish in the afternoon, Fox came to Hotham's house again:

& hee tooke mee in his armes & saide his house was my house: & hee was exceedinge glad att ye worke of ye Lorde & his power.⁷⁸

Afterwards Fox submitted twenty queries to Hotham, the first of which was whether 'ye seed of God was ever to bow downe to any Law butt that from God only'. Loath to enter into a dispute with 'any of men y^t pretend religion, and a Command and Notion about ye reach of mans naturall frame to comprehend', Hotham eventually responded with a lengthy letter to Fox.⁷⁹ About this time Hotham began gaining a reputation as one of two Justices of the Peace in the East Riding sympathetic to the Quakers, later meeting with James Nayler as well.⁸⁰ Indeed, Fox reported that Hotham was glad that 'ye

Lords power & truth was spreade & soe many had received it', attributing to him the remark:

if God had not raised uppe this principle light & life: ye nation had been overspread with rantisme & all ye Justices in ye nation coulede not stoppe it with all there lawes.⁸¹

It is noteworthy that Hotham had translated his elder brother Charles Hotham's *Ad Philosophiam Teutonicam Manuductio* (1648) as *An Introduction to the Tevtonick Philosophie* (1650). Dedicated to the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, this book sought to make Boehme's 'abstruse Notions' more accessible by 'taking off the dark style' of his 'magick language'.⁸² On 7 November 1653 Hotham completed *The Life of Jacob Behmen* (1654), a work largely derived from Abraham von Franckenberg's brief biography. Addressing the reader he conceded finding many 'obscure' things as well as 'highly honest, pious' and 'just' sentiments in Boehme's writings. Yet he trusted that this short relation would stir up more 'searching Spirits' to thoroughly weigh his publications.⁸³ Hotham's literary activities thus indicate that he may have discussed Boehme's ideas with Fox.

It is not known if Fox possessed works by Boehme. An inventory of his library in 1695 recorded 355 items. Numbers 1 to 108 have titles, the remainder do not. Of the known titles several are collections of bound tracts with only the first work indicated. Fox owned an edition of Hendrik Nicolaes's *Den Spiegel der Gerechtigheit* and Sebastian Franck's *The Forbidden Fruit: or, a Treatise Of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evill*.⁸⁴ It is thus possible that he also had some of Boehme's writings. This is significant because the extent of Boehme's influence upon Fox has been the subject of much debate. At issue are affinities of thought and expression, notably in Fox's vivid recollection of the power and light of Christ:

Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me, and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue. And I was at a stand in my mind whether I should practise physic for the good of mankind, seeing the

nature and virtues of the creatures were so opened to me by the Lord...the admirable works of the creation and the virtues thereof, may be known, through the openings of that divine Word of wisdom and power by which they were made.⁸⁵

Probably dictated in 1675 and edited by Thomas Ellwood about 1692, this extract from Fox's Journal is dated '1648' - more than three years before he met Durand Hotham. It has been compared to the preface of Boehme's *XL Questions Concerning the Soule* (1647) and a passage in *A Description Of Three Principles of the Divine Essence* (1648), which describes the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise watched over by the 'Cherubine with a naked [Or, warning flaming...] two edged Sword before it'.⁸⁶ The flaming sword (Genesis 3:24) was an important symbol for Fox; he used it as a device on one of his three seals.⁸⁷ This contrasts with iconography denoting the 'Conquest of the sword of the Cherubin in Babel', depicted as a sword with the point downward in *Mercurius Teutonicus*.⁸⁸

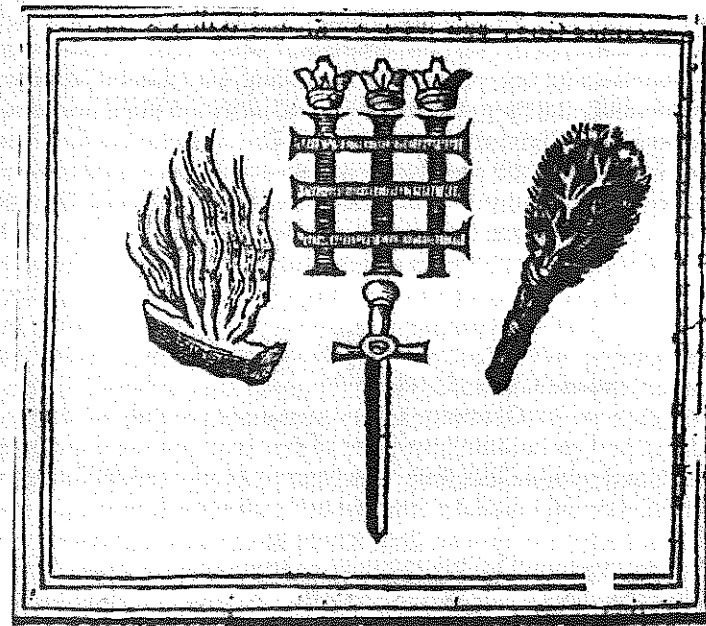


Figure 1. Detail from the title-page of Jacob Boehme's *Mercurius Teutonicus* (1649), by permission of the British Library.

Moreover, although 'the creation was opened to me' echoes Boehme's 'the Gate was opened unto me', it also resembles a phrase in John Everard's translation of *The Divine Pymander of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus* (1649) when 'all things were opened unto me'.⁸⁹ In short, while it appears that Fox was acquainted with Boehme's writings and that they shared a 'Seraphick' style, he does not seem to have privileged the Teutonic Philosopher over other sources.⁹⁰

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Boehme accepted the validity of two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The minister baptized the 'outward Body' with outward water, the Holy Ghost baptized the Soul with inward water of eternal life. At the Last Supper Christ's disciples had partaken of his immortal holy flesh and blood which passed into the 'Tincture' of their souls.⁹¹ These teachings aroused controversy among Quakers who could not reconcile them to their beliefs. In *One Blow at Babel In those of the People called Behmenites* (1662) John Anderdon (d.1685), former secretary to Major-General John Desborough and afterwards goldsmith of Bridgewater, Somerset acknowledged that there sometimes appeared 'an excellent spirit in Jacob Behmen'. Even so, he censured Boehme's followers for misunderstanding his expressions, accepting the baptism of infants and ignorantly feeding upon bread and wine, which was but a shadow of the body and blood of Christ. These 'Mediums' of 'Water, Bread and Wine', he declared, were carnal and unnecessary.⁹² Similarly, at the London Morning Meeting held at Rebecca Travers's house on 21 September 1674 it was decided by Stephen Crisp (1628-1692), William Bayly and six others not to print Ralph Fretwell's 'Epistle to the Behmenists' because they retained the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁹³ Bayly had read Boehme while Crisp knew him if not directly then through his interpreter and correspondent Jan Claus (fl. 1665-1720).

Though born in Germany Claus migrated, coming to dwell in London. There he became convinced of the 'Truth revealed and made known' to the Quakers but was seized at a Friends' meeting, imprisoned and at his trial sentenced to banishment from England. In 1665 Claus settled at Amsterdam where for the remainder of his life he was a leading Quaker.⁹⁴ Having accompanied Crisp as his interpreter on his travels through the United Provinces into Germany in the summer of 1669, Claus wrote to him in 1672 recounting his study of the writings of Johannes Tauler (c. 1300-1361), Franck, Weigel and Boehme.⁹⁵ Claus also translated James Nayler's *Milk for*

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Babes: and Meat for Strong Men into Dutch and had an extensive network of correspondents including Hilary Prache (1614-1679), some of whose letters he copied and forwarded to Crisp.⁹⁶ The son of Michael Prache, pastor at Teutschel near Liegnitz in Silesia, Hilary taught in noble families for several years before ordained at Breslau in 1651. Having been appointed pastor at Diersdorf he wrote to Abraham von Franckenberg concerning the explication of the seventy-two divine names of God. Prache, moreover, was an expert in Oriental languages and translated *Bakkascha = The Enquiry* by the Catalan Rabbi Jedaja Happenini (c. 1270-1340) into Latin. This was published at Leipzig in 1662 with a dedication to the rector of the University and was followed by a new edition of von Franckenberg's *Notæ Mysticæ & Mnemonicæ ad Bechinas Olam sive examen mundi R. Jedaja Happenini* ([Auerstadt?], 1673), to which Prache added a preface.⁹⁷ In May 1673 he wrote to Claus at Amsterdam from Goldberg, where he was now pastor and preacher, relating the activities of a group living close by who believed in infant baptism but attended neither Lutheran nor Catholic services, remaining still when others bowed, sang and read hymns. He described them as followers of Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489-1561) and had spoken with them in his house. Prache had heard William Ames preach at Breslau and added that among the few English books he possessed were two by George Fox, though he had owned works by George Keith.⁹⁸ On 4 June 1674 Prache departed Goldberg with his family, belongings and son-in-law Johann Georg Matern (c. 1640-1680). Assisted by the Schwenckfeldians they went to Hamburg thence probably by ship to Amsterdam and from there to England, where they joined the Quakers. Prache was soon employed at the Friends' printing house making hornbooks for children and occasionally rendering Dutch works into German. His wife and daughter were engaged in silk-weaving while Matern, previously teacher at the gymnasium in Goldberg and a candidate for the ministry, instructed Quaker children in languages and other 'necessary Sciences' at Waltham Abbey.⁹⁹

On 18 April 1676 Martin John, a notorious Schwenckfeldian physician and author of books under the name Matthæus Israel, wrote to Matern from Laubgrund in Silesia regarding the activities of the Quaker missionary Roger Longworth (c.1630-1687), who had been permitted to hold several silent meetings. Unprecedented, these attracted only a few curious people; John himself felt nothing. Furthermore, John detected disagreement among the Quakers for Matern had informed him that they loved Boehme's books, as he did

too. But when John asked Longworth if he liked them he answered that Boehme was 'a mighty hunter before the Lord, in y^e beginning was ye candel lighted in him, but he hunted before the Lord'. This was too much for John, as was the remark that 'they which had Jacob Behmens books were puffed up in their knowledge' and called 'Behmists'. Nonetheless, he was glad that Longworth had returned safely home.¹⁰⁰ After Matern had responded to another letter from John, Prache wrote to John from London on 9 October 1676 informing him that he had recently translated Sebastian Franck's *The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil* from German into English so 'Friends might have it to read, because it agrees with their position'. The summer before he had given the Amsterdam publisher Hendrick Beets (1625?-1708) his *double Extract from the writings of Jacob Boehmen, - Adam prior to the Fall, and Adam in and after the Fall -* with the expectation that he would get it printed. Moreover, Prache reported that rumour of a division among Quakers on account of Boehme's writings was a fearful falsehood:

I do not know in the whole of London any single one among the Friends, of whom there are several thousand, who holds to the writings of Jacob Boehmen in preference to the writings of Friends, for which reason he might be named a Boehmist. The position is this. Very many Friends had read the writings of Jacob Boehmen and were fond of them while they still belonged to the other sects ... All such still acknowledge the gift of the Spirit in the writings of Jacob Boehmen, and hold him to be a divinely illumined man who prophesied in particular about a people which was to come from the North, but they no longer turned to his writings, nor did they ever point them out to anyone else, for they know from daily experience that a single Quaker Meeting, of the kind that is held as it should be, makes greater demands, and is of more use, than the reading for many years of writings which talk so much of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil can ever prove to be. How then can they give the occasion for anyone to call them Boehmists? Certainly he is not a Quaker who is a Boehmist. A Boehmist makes much of the outward water-baptism of infants and of the outward bread and wine as very essential means of salvation, but let anyone name a single individual Quaker in the whole of London who holds such things, and is not aware of something better with regard to both these points. In this respect the Boehmists are to be sought among the Papists who in a like fashion lay much stress on these

shadowy things. There is none such to be found among the Quakers.¹⁰¹

Prache also declared that he would have become a Quaker sooner had he never seen Boehme's writings because the 'high knowledge' contained in them had diverted him from the 'true and only' way he had discovered in his youth through reading Weigel. He added that the 'learned' poet and future martyr Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651-1689) of Breslau was in London and had recently defended 'Jacob Boehmen against the Academicos (regarding philosophy) in published writings'.¹⁰²

In February 1677 Stephen Crisp completed his translation from the Dutch of a short treatise spuriously attributed to Abraham von Franckenberg. Originally written in Latin, this '*Fruit of that pure living Tree of Righteousness*' by 'a Man of Honour and Repute' was published as *A warning against the deceit of setting up Man's reason as Judge in Spiritual Matters* (1677). Benjamin Furly had probably sent him the now untraced Dutch edition printed at Rotterdam in 1674.¹⁰³ From 1675 genuine reprints of German works by von Franckenberg were also issued by Hendrick Beets who, in partnership with Benjamin Clark of London, Isaac Naeran of Rotterdam and the Quaker Jacob Claus (c. 1644-fl. 1720) of Amsterdam, brought out Robert Barclay's *Theologiae Verè Christianæ Apologia* (1676).¹⁰⁴ Jacob Claus published books in German by Stephen Crisp and in Dutch by his brother Jan and William Penn. Between 1687 and 1690 he issued German translations of the complete works of Hendrick Jansen van Barrefelt (d. 1594?), a prominent member of the Family of Love who broke from Nicolaes in 1573 and used the name Hiël (the 'Life of God').¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Claus published Jacob Boehme's *Het Mysterium Magnum Ote een Verklaaring over Het Eeste Boek Mosis* (Amsterdam, 1700). At the auction of Furly's library in October 1714 he brought a number of books among them *The Epsistles of Jacob Behmen* (1649) for 10s. and Boehme's *Weg tot Christus* (Amsterdam, 1685). Claus sold some of this stock including the complete works of Thomas à Kempis but not the items by Boehme to the Quaker Thomas Story (1670?-1742) for 171l. 16s. A great part of these, however, were lost at sea.¹⁰⁶

In December 1681 the Dublin Men's Meeting sent several members to visit Thomas Smith, John Beckett and Christopher Marshall, who owned copies of Boehme's books and were advocating his principles, notably that God's wrath and the Devil's actions are one 'in nature and property'. Yet the three remained steadfast. Then a letter was addressed to John Crabb, who had also 'been something Levened

with that spirit of theirs'. On 28 March 1682 the Men's Meeting commissioned a paper condemning those who 'Runn into faulse Liberty under any pretences whatsoever & Runs from Truth into Errors'. Signed and read publicly, it denounced the 'blasphemous principles & disorderly practices' of Boehme's adherents, who had been beguiled by 'Confused, antichristian, Antiscriptural, Imaginatory and Blasphemous dark principles', Crabb was subsequently examined and admitted loaning Beckett's books. But he refused to recant and in June was required to remain silent in meetings.¹⁰⁷ Yet Crabb would not be silenced. He issued an epitome of a book he had written as *A Testimony concerning the works of The Living God* (1682). Influenced by Boehme's notions concerning the 'Wrath of God' and the 'State of Man in the Fall' which resembled the 'Beast that perisheth', Crabb quoted from Boehme's testimony concerning 'True Faith' contained in *The Tree of Christian Faith* (1654):

Faith is not an historical knowledge, for a Man to make Articles of it, and to depend only on them, and to force his Mind into works of his Reason; but Faith is * One Spirit with God [* Or a Spirit One with, or in God]: for the holy Spirit moveth in the Spirit of Faith. True Faith is the Might of God, One Spirit with God; it worketh in God, and with God ... For as God is free from all Inclination or Deviation, so that he doth what he will, and need give no account for it, so also is the True Faith free in the Spirit of God, it hath no more But one Inclination, viz. into the Love and Mercy of God, viz. that it casts its willing unto Gods willing; and to go out from the Syderial and Elementary reason.¹⁰⁸

As in Dublin, so in Philadelphia there was dissent among Friends. In 1685 after 'great Charge and Trouble' William Bradford (1663-1752) arrived in Pennsylvania with a letter from George Fox recommending that he act as printer for Quakers there. Bradford's first production was Samuel Atkin's almanac *Kalendarium Pennsilvaniense* (Philadelphia, 1685), which advertised a variety of medicines. Soon Bradford was also selling books by Quaker authors. After printing espistles on the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting's instructions he printed an almanac for 1687 by Daniel Leeds (1652-1720), a Quaker student of agriculture and astrology. In October 1687, however, the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting condemned Leed's almanac, ordering Bradford to deliver his unsold stock to the house of a leading Friend, for which he would be reimbursed, and to

recover copies that had already been dispersed. Perhaps this was Leed's almanac for 1688 as no copies are extant.¹⁰⁹ The next year Bradford printed and sold the first American edition of Boehme's writings *The Temple of Wisdom for the Little World* (Philadelphia, 1688). This 'contracted' collection was published by Leeds following 'many years acquaintance' with the works of this 'divine Philosopher'.¹¹⁰ Bradford later became involved in the Keithian schism, was indicted for libel, imprisoned for four months and subsequently moved to New York in 1693. There he abandoned Quakerism but continued printing and selling Leed's almanacs for most years until 1713. Leeds likewise became embroiled in the Keithian controversy, warning against the 'Hetrodox' doctrines and 'Hypocritical' conduct of his former friends.¹¹¹

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The lawyer Peter Pett (1630-1699) was confident that Quakers would be cured of their 'melancholy and errors' by hard and diligent labour, for any 'Enthusiast' exhausted by 'Mechanicall Trade' during the day would undoubtedly find 'little gusto in reading *Jacob Behmon's* works at night'.¹¹² Such measures to enforce conformity- whether earnest or facetious - were unnecessary, as the Quaker leadership in London, Dublin and Philadelphia demonstrated through their ability to use institutional mechanisms such as the morning, monthly, six weeks, quarterly and yearly meetings to impose doctrinal uniformity. Significantly, several of Boehme's Quakers readers became schismatics: Rice Jones, John Perrot, Robert Rich, William Bradford, Daniel Leeds. Some were active outside England: Ralph Fretwell, Benjamin Furlly, John Crabb. Others were foreigners: Jan Claus, Jacob Claus, Hilary Prache, Johann Georg Matern. Furthermore, though enemies such as Farmer, Faldo, Comber, Baxter and Muggleton conflated aspects of Quakerism with Behmenism, while More and Hallywell emphasized similarities with Familism, religious controversy and persecution were important elements in the formation of Quaker identities. Thus John Pordage's undated treatises *From certain false intended perfections* and *Christ within us* which included sections written against the errors of the Quakers, accentuated the differences between Friends and Behmenists.¹¹³ Likewise, the Philadelphian Society, a theosophical group established by Pordage's successors Jane Lead (1624-1704) and her son-in-law Francis Lee (1661-1719), published *The state of the Philadelphian Society* (1697) partly to distinguish themselves from Quakers: 'they were not so silly as to place Religion in *Thouing* and *Theeing*, in keeping on their Hats, or in a *sad Countenance*', even if they

agreed with the Quakers as to the '*Internal Principle of a Light within*'.¹¹⁴ As a Huguenot traveller observed, the 'common Opinion ranges these People under the Class of Quakers, and not without Reason, tho' by the Writings they have lately publish'd, one would think a different Judgment ought to be made of them'.¹¹⁵

Doctrinal uniformity, silent meetings and a preference for Friends' plan style over Boehme's abstruse notions may account for why many who first became convinced of Quakerism turned away from the Teutonic Philosopher - as they did from other authors also. Yet even in the eighteenth century some Friends continued reading Boehme. In 1717 Richard Hutton, steward of the Quaker workhouse at Clerkenwell, recorded lending Boehme's works to Edward Durston and Stephen Crisp's sermons to Joseph Clutton (*d.* 1743), an apprentice apothecary.¹¹⁶ Clutton became a famous Quaker chemist and 'great admirer of Jac. Behmen', and in July 1739 loaned a manuscript about him by the German draughtsman Dionysius Andreas Freher (1649-1728) to the poet Byrom (1692-1763).¹¹⁷ Interestingly, in April 1735 Byrom had dined with his Quaker acquaintances William Vigor and William Penn at the 'Three Tuns', where they 'talked about Jacob Behmen'.¹¹⁸ Moreover, on 1 April 1788 the Quaker minister John Thorp (1742-1817) wrote to Francis Dodshon (1714-1793) from Manchester:

'It is a great sin' says Jacob Bhemem 'to despair of the Mercy of God; despair is the most powerfull Talon of the Enemy' and in another place he writes thus 'let no man despair and say there is a fast door upon me, I can not be saved for such thoughts the Devils have, and the damned in Hell; If I knew there were but seven men elected in our city, or scarce two I would not despair but believe that I were one of them'.¹¹⁹

At Byrom's request William Law (1686-1761), nonjuror, devotional writer and reader of Boehme, had written to Dodshon, née Henshaw in 1736 vainly seeking to dissuade her from leaving the established Church to join the Quakers. The title of her tract *A Serious Call, In tender Compassion to the Sinners in Sion* (Macclesfield, 1744) echoed Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729). An itinerant minister active in Kendal, Leek and Bristol, she was friends with Samuel Dyer, who owned a copy of *A Compendious View of Christianity* (Bristol, 1799). This book, which contained extracts from Law's letters to enquirers, was printed and sold by J.Mills of Castle

Street, son of Bristol publisher and bookseller Thomas Mills (*c.* 1735-1820).¹²⁰ While preaching 'in the Methodist way' Thomas Mills issued Madame Guyon's *The Worship of God, in Spirit and in Truth* (Bristol, 1774), as well as Boehme's *The Way to Christ Discovered* (Bath, 1775). In 1778 he became a Quaker, but was disowned in 1789. His daughter Selina was mother of the historian and essayist Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859); Mills's grandchildren remembered him as 'an old man of imposing appearance, with long white hair, talking incessantly of Jacob Boehmen'.¹²¹ Another Quaker influenced by Boehme was Isaac Blackbeard (1712-1788), barber of Whitby. His treatise *Man's Own Book of Three Leaves* (Whitby, 1783) is divided into sections on the dark world, the light world and the outward, visible world. A note on the title-page claims it was written 'not with approbation of Friends, by a simple, perhaps well-meaning Behmenite, though under the name of a Quaker'.¹²²

Though there are fewer examples of Boehme's eighteenth-century North American Quaker readership it is noteworthy that the anti-slavery campaigner John Woolman (1720-1772) studied Thomas à Kempis and owned a copy of Edward Taylor's *Jacob Behmen's Theosophick Philosophy Unfolded* (1691).¹²³ Woolman's *Journal* was edited by the Quaker poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892), who was familiar with Plato and Boehme. Significantly, Whittier's 'The Pennsylvania Pilgrim' (1872) commemorated the mystic and communitarian leader Johannes Kelpuis (1673-1708):

Or painful Kelpuis from his hermit den
Wissahickon, maddest of good men,
Dreamed o' ver the Chiliaist dreams of Petersen
Deep in the woods, where the small river slid
Snake-like in shade, the Helmstadt Mystic hid
Weird as a wizard, over arts forbid
Reading the books of Daniel and of John,
And Behmen's Morning-Redness, through the Stone
Of Wisdom, vouchsafed to his eyes alone.¹²⁴

By the early 1660s there were perhaps 40 000 Quakers and their numbers continued to grow until the 1680s. Though the thoughts of most are unrecorded, between 1652 and 1656 a little over one hundred Quaker authors contributed to the publication of about 300 tracts.¹²⁵ While this study cannot be comprehensive it is clear that only a minority of early Quaker printed texts and extant manuscripts show familiarity with Boehme's terms or doctrines. Nonetheless, among those that were influenced by Boehme were several important

figures in the British Isles, Europe, West Indies and North America at a time when Quakerism was taking shape. There may indeed be no definitive answer to the question of Quaker origins, but the extent of Boehme's Quaker readership and the ways in which they engaged with his writings forms a crucial part of the solution. So too does the Quaker reception of works by Sebastian Franck, Hendrik Niclaes and Hiël; kindred subjects needing more detailed examination.¹²⁶

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Friends House Library, hereafter acted as FHL, Portfolio MS 15/90, 'Account of the Meeting held at Rebecca Travers' (21 September 1674), transcribed in FHL, Minutes of the Morning Meeting 1673-1692, vol.1 pp 1-2, and printed in Margaret Bailey, *Milton and Jacob Boehme. A Study of German Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York, 1914), p 102 n. 1.
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Ellistone

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