

ENGLISH SECTS :

An Historical Handbook

BY

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MUGGLETONIANS

OF the many sects which sprang into existence during the Commonwealth —Traskites, Shakers, Ranters, Dippers, Behmenists, and the like—probably three only survive, the Seventh Day Baptists, the Society of Friends (the Quakers), and the Muggletonians. Of these three, one only, the Quakers, is of any account ; the other two are obscure and numerically negligible.

The Muggletonians derive their name from Lodowick Muggleton, who was born in Walnut-Tree Yard, Bishopsgate Without, in 1609, and was baptized in the Parish Church of St. Botolph. Macaulay (*History of England*) describes him thus

A mad tailor named Lodowick Muggleton wandered from pothouse to pothouse, tippling ale, and denouncing eternal torments against all those who refused to believe, on his testimony, that the Supreme Being was only six feet high, and that the sun was just four miles from the earth."

Muggleton was certainly a tailor, but by no means a mad one, for, apart from his strange heresies, he was particularly

sane. So far from being a tippler, he taught the virtue of sobriety. He indulged in imprecations, it is true, on those who rejected his teaching, which, however, was not so monstrously absurd as Macaulay represented it to be, though he ridiculed the conclusions of astronomers, and clung to the belief that the sun revolves round the earth.

When he was about forty years of age he came under the influence of two Ranters, John Robins and Thomas Tany, his cousin, John Reeve, also a tailor, being likewise affected. In 1652 Reeve gave out that he was appointed, " by voice of words from Jesus Christ, Who was the only God," to bring in a new dispensation, with Muggleton for his spokesman. They represented, he affirmed, the two witnesses of the Apocalypse, and a statement of the new doctrines was drawn up by Reeve in *A Transcendant Treatise*. In this it is declared that the deity consists only in a " glorified body of flesh like unto a man in compass and substance " ; that the devil is human reason ; that astronomy is all wrong, and that heaven is quite near, just above the stars. God, the Muggletonians were taught to believe, having started the world, left it to men to operate, and exercises no immediate

control over human affairs, though on a few occasions He has intervened with revelations, the last of which was the Third Commission, declared by John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton. This revelation, or testament, is regarded by their disciples as inspired equally with the Sacred Scriptures.

The sect has no ministry and no worship. It meets irregularly in the Reading Room of a house built on the site of Muggleton's birthplace, and listens to selections from the Bible, the Book of Enoch, the writings of Reeve and Muggleton, and, strange to say, another old apocryphal treatise, "The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs." The nearest approach it makes to worship is the singing of its own "Divine Songs," but it is distinctly understood that they express nothing more than thanksgiving. Two festivals are observed, "The Great Holiday," which commemorates on February 16th the founding of the sect, and the "Little Holiday," on July 30th, the day on which Muggleton was released from prison. The Muggletonians make no proselytes. They are a close and exclusive body consisting of a few families. The score or so of members are persons of good character, industrious, and well-to-do.