

VII.

THE PROPHET OF WALNUT-TREE YARD.

"Did you ever hear tell of Lodowick Muggleton?"
"Not I."

"That is strange. Know then that he was the founder of our poor society, and after him we are frequently, though opprobriously, termed Muggletonians, for we are Christians. Here is his book ; I will sell it cheap."—LAVENGRO.

SCRUPULOUS veracity was hardly a characteristic of the late George Borrow. A man of great memory, he was also a man of fertile imagination, and where the two are found in excess, side by side in the same intellect, they are apt to twine round one another, so to speak, and the product is something which the matter-of-fact man abhors. I do not doubt that Borrow did meet a Muggletonian at Bristol—I think it was there—some sixty years ago ; but I am pretty sure that he knew very little indeed about the Muggletonians, and that he could have hardly opened the

book which he implies that he purchased, and which I am almost certain he never read. I have a strong suspicion that he very much antedated the incident which he narrates, for I myself knew an old second-hand bookseller in a back street at Bristol, who was a Muggletonian, with whom I made acquaintance when a lad. He was a slow-speaking, wary, suspicious, and dirty old man, and as I had not sufficient funds to be a good customer, I daresay he did not think it worth his while to be communicative, but he told me one day that he had been one of the original subscribers to the *Spiritual Epistles* which were reprinted in quarto years before I was born ; though, as he confessed, his name does not appear on the list of names printed at the end of the preface, which list, he assured me, was very incomplete, as he from his own knowledge could certify. This old man would have been very old indeed if he had been old when Borrow was a youth ; and yet, as I say, I suspect he was the very man of whom mention is made in the extract I have given above. He was the only Muggletonian I ever knew, but he certainly was not the last of his sect, and I should not be at all surprised to hear that it is a flourishing sect still, and that it still has its assemblies, its votaries, its literature, and its propaganda. It is true that the name *Muggletonians* does not appear in that astonish-

ing list of religious denominations which the Registrar-General was enabled to compile for the year 1883 ; but that proves little, inasmuch as the closer a religious corporation is, the more exclusive, the less does it care to register the name of the building in which it may choose to assemble for worship ; and I observe that the Southcotians are no longer to be found upon that list, though I happen to know that they are not extinct yet, nor has their faith in their prophets and her mission quite died out from the face of the earth.

This is certain, that as late as 1820 an edition of the *Spiritual Epistles*, which must have cost at that time two or three hundred pounds to print, was subscribed for, and that nine years afterwards appeared *Divine Songs of the Muggletonians*—they were not ashamed of the name—printed also by subscription, filling 621 pages, and showing pretty clearly that there had of late been a strange revival of the sect : an outburst of new fervour having somehow been awakened, and an irrepressible passion for writing "Songs" having displayed itself, which had not been without its effect in resuscitating dormant enthusiasm. The vagaries of the human mind in what, for want of any better designation, we call "religious belief" have always had for me a peculiar fascination, as they have for others. Epiphanius,

whose name is and used to be a terror to her Royal Highness in days gone by, when I insisted upon reading to her about the peculiar people who made it a matter of faith to eat bread and cheese at the Eucharist—Epiphanius is to me positively entertaining, and Pagitt's *Heresiography* is none the less instructive because it is a vulgar catch-penny little book, made up, like Peter Pindar's razors, to sell. To me it seems that to dismiss even the wildest and foolishlest opinion *which makes way*, as if it were a mere absurdity that does not deserve notice, is to show a certain flippancy and shallowness. Do not all thoughtful men pass through certain stages of intellectual growth, and are not the convictions of our youth held very differently from those which we find ourselves swayed by in our later years ? The beliefs which the multitude take up with are such as the untrained and the half-trained are always captivated by, whether individually or in the mass. There are limits to our powers of assimilation according as our development has been arrested or is still going on, and he who hopes to understand the course of human affairs or to make any intelligent forecast of what is coming can never afford to neglect the study of morbid appetites or morbid anatomy in the domain of mind.

There is a strong family likeness among all fanatics ; and this is characteristic of them all, that they

are profusely communicative and absolutely honest. Prophets have no secrets, no reserve, no doubts, they are always true men. John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton are no exception to the general rule. We can follow their movements pretty closely for some years. The book of *The Acts of the Witnesses of the Spirit* furnishes us with quite as much as we want to know about the sayings and doings of the grotesque pair and their early extravagances ; and Muggleton's letters cover a period of forty years, during all which time he was going in and out among the artisans and small traders of the city, obstinately asserting himself in season and out of season, and leaving behind him in his eccentric chronicle such a minute and faithful picture of London life among the middle—the lower middle—class during the last half of the seventeenth century as is to be found nowhere else. The reader must be prepared for the most startling freaks of language, for very vulgar profanity, the more amazing because so manifestly unintended. When people break away from all the traditions of the past and surrender themselves to absolute anarchy in morals and religion the old terminology ceases to be employed in the old way, ceases indeed to have any meaning. The prophet or the philosopher who sets himself to invent a new theory of the universe or a new creed

for his followers to embrace, can hardly avoid shocking and horrifying those who are content to use words as their forefathers did and attach to these words the same sort of sacredness that the Hebrews did to the Divine name. There is no need to do more than allude to this side of the Muggletonian writing. What we are concerned with is the story of the prophet's life, which has been told with the utmost frankness and simplicity ; a more unvarnished tale it would be difficult to find, or one which bears more the stamp of truth upon its every line.

The Acts of the Witnesses of the Spirit is a posthumous work written by Muggleton when he was very old, and left behind him in manuscript with directions that it should be published after his death. It is a quarto volume of 180 pages and is a book of some rarity. It was published in 1699, with an epistle dedicatory to all true Christian people, apparently written by Thomas Tomkinson, one of the chosen seed. After preparing us for what is coming by dwelling upon the wonderful stories in the Old Testament and the New, Muggleton plunges into his subject by giving us a brief account of his own and his brother prophet's parentage and early biography. Let the reader understand that here beginneth the third chapter of *The Acts of the Witnesses* at the third verse :—

"3. As for John Reeve, he was born in Wiltshire ; his father was clerk to a deputy of Ireland, a gentleman as we call them by his place, but fell to decay.

" 4. So he put John Reeve apprentice here at London to a tailor by trade. He was out of his apprenticeship before I came acquainted with him ; he was of an honest, just nature, and harmless.

"5. But a man of no great natural wit or wisdom ; no subtlety or policy was in him, nor no great store of religion ; he had lost what was traditional; only of an innocent life.

" 7. And I, Lodowick Muggleton, was born in Bishopgate Street, near the Earl of Devonshire's house, at the corner house called Walnut-tree Yard.

"8. My father's name was John Muggleton ; he was a smith by trade—that is, a farrier or horse doctor ; he was in great respect with the postmaster in King James's time ; he had three children by my mother, two sons and one daughter, I was the youngest and my mother loved me."

His mother died, his father married again, whereupon the boy was sent into the country—boarded out as we say—and kept there till his sixteenth year, when he was brought back to London and apprenticed to a tailor—one John Quick—" a quiet, peaceable man, not cruel to servants, which liked me very

well." Muggleton took to his trade and pleased his master. The journeymen were a loose lot, " bad husbands and given to drunkenness, but my nature was inclined to be sober." Hitherto the young man had received no religious training ; when he had served his time, however, " hearing in those days great talk among the vulgar people and especially amongst youth, boys, and young maids, of a people called Puritans. . . . I liked their discourse upon the Scriptures and pleaded for a holy keeping of the Sabbath day, which my master did not do, nor I his servant."

This must have been about the year 1630—for Muggleton was born in June 1610—when the Sabatarian controversy was at its height, and the feeling of the country was approaching fever heat, and when Charles the First had resolved to try and govern without a Parliament, and when Archbishop Abbot was in disgrace, and Laud had begun to exercise his predominant influence. Muggleton was but little impressed by " the people called Puritans," and he went on his old way. When he had nearly served his time, he began to look about him. The tailor's trade did not seem likely to lead to much, unless it were combined with something else, and a brilliant opening offered itself, as he was at work for a pawnbroker in Houndsditch. " The broker's wife had one

daughter alive. The mother, being well persuaded of my good natural temper, and of my good husbandry, and that I had no poor kindred come after me to be any charge or burthen to her daughter, . . . proposed to me that she would give me a hundred pounds with her to set up. . . . So the maid and I were made sure by promise, and I was resolved to have the maid to wife, and to keep a broker's shop, and lend money on pawns, and grow rich as others did." Muggleton had not yet been admitted to the freedom of the city, and the marriage was arranged to take place after he should have done so. In the meantime he found himself working side by side with William Reeve, Prophet John Reeve's brother, at this time a "very zealous Puritan," with whom he talked of his prospects. "I loved the maid, and desired to be rich," he tells us ; but these Puritan people were horrified at his deliberately intending to live the life of a usurer, and they "threatened great judgments, and danger of damnation hereafter."

It is clear that the frightful eschatology of the time was exercising a far greater power upon the imagination of the masses than anything else. People were dwelling upon all that was terrible and gloomy in the picture of a future life ; the one thought with the visionaries was this—Save yourselves from the wrath to come. "I was extremely fearful of eternal

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damnation," says Muggleton, " thinking my soul might go into hell fire without a body, as all people did at that time."

There was evidently a struggle between conviction and inclination, and it ended as we should have expected—the marriage was broken off. Then followed some years of vehement religious conflict ; " Neither did I hear any preach in these days but the Puritan ministers, whose hair was cut short. *For if a man with long hair had gone into the pulpit to preach, I would have gone out of the Church again, though he might preach better than the other.*" All through this time visions of hell and torment, and devils and damnation troubled him ; now and then there were " elevations in my mind, but these were few and far between ; a while after all was lost again." He soon consoled himself for his matrimonial disappointment; he married and had three daughters, then his first wife died. He throve **in** his calling, " only the spirit of fear of hell was still upon me, but not so extreme as it was before." He took a second wife, and the civil war began.

" And generally the Puritans were all for the Parliament, and most of my society and acquaintance did fall away and declined in love one towards another. Some of them turned to Presbytery, and some turned Independents ; others fell to be Ranters,

and some fell to be mere Atheists. So that our Puritan people were so divided and scattered in our religion, that I was altogether at a loss ; for all the zeal we formerly had was quite worn out. For I had seen the utmost perfection and satisfaction that could be found in that way, except I would do it for loaves, *but loaves was never my aim.*"

The civil war ran its course, but Muggleton cared nothing for the general course of events. What were kings and bishops and Lords and Commons to him ? he was living in quite another world. As for Laud and Strafford, and Pym and Hampden, he does not even once name them. He makes not the slightest allusion to the death of Charles the First, though he was living within half a mile of Whitehall when the king's head fell on the block. Prophets of the Muggleton type are so busied about their own souls and their own spiritual condition, that the battles, murders, and sudden deaths of other men, great or small, give them no concern whatever.

A couple of years or so after the execution of the king, " it came to pass I heard of several prophets and prophetesses that were about the streets. . . . Also I heard of two other men that were counted greater than prophets—to wit, John Tannye and John Robins. John Tannye, he declared himself to be the Lord's High Priest, therefore he circumcised

himself according to the law. Also he declared that he was to gather the Jews out of all nations, . . . with many other strange and wonderful things. And as for John Robins, he declared himself to be God Almighty. Also he said that he had raised from the dead several of the prophets, as Jeremiah and others. Also I saw several others of the prophets that was said to be raised by him, *for I have had nine or ten of them at my house at a time, of those that were said to be raised from the dead.*"

Is madness contagious ? Or is it that, while the sane can exercise but a very limited power over the insane, there is no limit to the influence which the insane can gain over one another ? Living in a world of their own, where delusions pass for palpable facts, where the logical faculty accepts the wildest visions as of equal significance with actual realities, these dreamers have a calculus of their own which includes the symbols in use among the sane, but comprehends besides *a notation which these latter* attach no meaning to, reject, and deride.

" Would you be so kind as tell me, sir, what's a ohm ? " said the worthy Mr. Stiggins to me the other day. " It's a modern term used in electricity, which I am too ignorant to explain to you." He looked full at me for more than five seconds without a word, then he said, " I'm thinking that this man

was a fool to talk about ohms when not even you knew what a ohm means. And he came from Cambridge College too, and he's got a vote ! I reckon when a man can't talk the same as other folks he'd ought to be shut up." Indignant Stiggins ! But are we not all intolerant ?

John Robins had acquired an almost unlimited ascendancy over his crazy prophets, and speedily acquired the like ascendancy over Muggleton. What specially fascinated him was that all John Robins's prophets " had power from him to damn any that did oppose or speak evil of him. So his prophets gave sentence of damnation upon many, to my knowledge, for speaking evil of him, they not knowing him whether he was true or false." Muggleton was profoundly impressed, but according to his own account he was a silent observer, and waited. One of the prophets often came to his house and was welcome ; he " spake as an angel of God, and I never let him go without eating and drinking," for Muggleton was a man of large appetite and demanded large supplies of food, nor did he stint himself of meat and drink or withhold creature comforts from those he loved.

Just at this time Muggleton " fell into a melancholy." He had arrived at the prophetic age ; he

had completed his fortieth year. " Then did two motives arise in me and speak in me as two lively voices, as if two spirits had been speaking in me, one answering the other as if they were not my own spirit." So that our noble laureate was anticipated by two centuries, unless indeed the " two lively voices " make themselves heard at times to most men who have ears to hear them. Muggleton's voices were not very high-toned voices ; they were voices that spake of heaven and hell, nothing more. Love and duty never seem to have formed the subject of his meditations. " For I did not so much mind to be saved, as I did to escape being damn'd. For I thought, if I could but lie still in the earth for ever, it would be as well with me as it would be if I were in eternal happiness . . . for I did not care whether I was happy so I might not be miserable. I cared not for heaven so I might not go to hell. These things pressed hard upon my soul, even to the wounding of it."

The battle within him went on fiercely for some time, and it ended as we should have expected. " I was so well satisfied in my mind as to my eternal happiness, that I was resolved now to be quiet and to get as good a living as I could in this world and live as comfortably as I could here, thinking that this revelation should have been beneficial to nobody

but myself." The " motional voices," and visions, and questionings, continued from April 1651 to January 1652 ; and it was during this time that the intimacy between Muggleton and Reeve became more closely cemented, for " John Reeve was so taken with my language that his desires were *extreme earnest* that he might have the same revelation as I had. His desires were so great that he was troublesome unto me, for if I went into one room, into another, he would follow me to talk to me." His persistence was rewarded, and just when Muggleton's visions ceased " in the month of January 1652, about the middle of the month, John Reeve came to me very joyful and said, Cousin Lodowick, now said he, I know what revelation of Scripture is as well as thee." Reeve's revelations increased, and never ceased for two weeks. " First visions, then by voice of words to the hearing of the ear three mornings together the third, fourth, and fifth days of February, 1652, and the year of John Reeve's life forty-two, and the year of my life forty-one."

Two men in this curious ecstatic condition obviously could not stop at this point. It was a critical moment—would they enter into rivalry or spiritual partnership ? If the latter, then who was to be the leader, who would make the first move ? It was soon settled.

" The first evening God *spare* to John Reeve he came to my house and said, Cousin Lodowick, God bath given thee unto me for ever, and the tears ran down both sides his cheeks amain. So I asked him what was the matter, for he looked like one that had been risen out of the grave, he being a fresh-coloured man the day before, but the tears ran down his cheeks apace." John Reeve was not yet prepared to deliver his commission with authority ; it was coming, but not yet. Meanwhile he turned to Muggleton's children and pronounced them blessed, " but especially thy daughter Sarah, she shall be the teacher of all the women in London." Sarah was hiding on the stairs and was not a little afraid ; she was a girl of fourteen, but she accepted her mission there and then.

She proved to be a valuable helper, " and several persons came afterwards to my house more to discourse with her than us, and they marvelled that one so young should have such knowledge and wisdom." Next day John Reeve came again, and Muggleton was pronounced to be the *mouth* of the new revelation, " as Aaron was given to be Moses' mouth."

The first thing to be done was to depose the other two prophets, Robins and Tannye, and to hoist them on their own petard. It had to be seen who could damn hardest. For one moment even Muggle-

ton's stout heart failed, he would take another with him to be present at the great trial of strength. He called upon a certain Thomas Turner to accompany him, " else you must be cursed to all eternity. But his wife was exceeding wroth and fearful, and she said, if John Reeve came again to her husband that she would run a spit in his guts, so John Reeve cursed her to eternity." Whereupon Turner, appalled by the sentence, complied with the order and went. The three presented themselves before the other madman, and John Reeve uttered his testimony, denouncing him as a false prophet and gave him a month to repent of his misdeeds. When the month had elapsed Reeve wrote the sentence of eternal damnation upon him " and left it at his lodging, and after a while he and his great matters perished in the sea. For he made a little boat to carry him to Jerusalem, and going to Holland to call the Jews there, he and one Captain James was cast away and drowned, so all his powers came to nothing."

The day after the interview with Tannye, the prophets proceeded to deal with John Robins. He had been thrown into Bridewell by Cromwell, and there he lay, his worshippers still resorting to him, for any one with money could visit a prisoner in gaol as often as he pleased. When the prophets appeared

at the gate empty handed, the keeper as a matter of course refused them admittance. Then said John Reeve to the keeper, " Thou shall never be at peace." By and by they were shown where Robins's cell was ; they summoned him to the window, and a strange interview took place, which is minutely described. It ended by Reeve delivering his charge and pronouncing his sentence. Many had been the crimes of John Robins. He had ruined and deceived men in a multitude of ways; among others " thou givest them leave to abstain by degrees from all kinds of food, thou didst feed them with windy things, as apples and other fruit that was windy, and they drank nothing but water; therefore look what measure thou hast measured to others we will measure again to thee."

John Robins was utterly mastered ; " he pulled his hands off the grates and laid them together and said, It is finished ; the Lord's will be done." In two months he had written a letter of recantation, was released from durance, and is heard of no more.

" Thus the reader may see that these two powers were brought down in these two days' messages from the Lord."

The world was all before them now. It remained that the new prophets should have some distinctive dogma, and that the printing press should be called

in as an accessory to spread their fame. Again John Reeve took the lead, and in 1652 he wrote an account of his divine commission and published his first work, *A Transcendant Spiritual Treatise*, which told of his last revelation of the message to Tannye and Robins.

While the book was passing through the press the prophets lived by their trade, and made no attempt to preach before any assembly. They *talked* incessantly, and they cursed liberally. At last the children in the streets began to follow Reeve and pelt him, crying after him, " There goes the prophet that damns people ! " Muggleton, meanwhile, was always ready to meet an inquirer, and to eat and drink with him. " On one occasion an old acquaintance would needs have me drink with him, that he might have some talk with me, and there followed a neighbour of his, a gentleman, as we call them ; his name was Penson, and he sat down in our company." Soon Penson began to deride and abuse the prophet ; whereupon Muggleton calmly " did pronounce this Penson cursed to eternity." Penson did not like being damned under the circumstances. "Then he rose up, and with both his fists smote upon my head. . . But it came to pass that this Penson was sick immediately after, and in a week or ten days after he died, much troubled in his

mind, and tormented insomuch that his friends and relations sought to apprehend me for a witch, he being a rich man, but they couldn't tell how to state the matter, so they let it fall."

It is pretty clear that John Reeve was from the first disposed to go beyond his brother prophet ; and shortly after the incident of Penson's death Reeve made a grand *coup*, which produced a profound impression. Muggleton had damned a *gentleman*. Reeve tried his power upon the same class, and succeeded in actually converting two of them, who were influential men among the Ranters. The Ranters were startled and puzzled. " And it came to pass that one of these Ranters kept a victualling house and sold drink in the Minorities, and they would spend their money there. So John Reeve and myself came there, and many of them despised our declaration. So John Reeve gave sentence of eternal damnation upon many of them, and one of them, being more offended than all the rest, was moved with such wrath and fury that five or six men could hardly keep him off, his fury was so hot. Then John Reeve said unto the people standing by, " Friends," said he, I pray you stand still on both sides of the room, and let there be a space **in** the middle, and I will lay down my head upon the ground and let this furious man tread upon my

head and do what he will unto me. . . .' So John Reeve pulled off his hat and laid his face fiat to the ground, and the people stood still. So the man came running with great fury, and when he came near him, lifting up his foot to tread on his neck, the man started back again and said, " No, I scorn to tread upon a man that lieth down to me.' And the people all marvelled at this thing."

Though Muggleton does not make much of this incident, it appears to have been a very important one in the early history of the sect, for from this moment the numbers of Muggletonians began to increase, and they began to absorb a small army of wandering monomaniacs who were roaming about London and talking about *religion*, and visions, and revelations, and attaching themselves first to one body and then to another, according as they could get admission to the meeting-houses and be allowed to preach and harangue. Astrologers too, came and conferred with the prophets, and drunken scoffers laid bets that they would get the prophet's blessing ; and on one occasion a company of " Atheistical Ranters " made a plot to turn the tables upon Muggleton, and damn him and Reeve. Three of " the most desperatest " agreed to do it. " So the time appointed came, and there was prepared a good dinner of pork, and the three came

ready prepared to curse us." Part of the agreement was that the dinner should follow upon the cursing. But whether it was that the rogues could do nothing until they were fortified with drink, or that a sudden spasm of conscientiousness came upon them, or that they were like superstitious people who with blanched lips loudly protest that they do not believe in ghosts, but decline on principle to walk through a churchyard after dark, these three fellows all ran away from their engagements at the eleventh hour. " So they departed without their dinner of pork."

The prophets were becoming notorious. The Ranters and John Robins had been vanquished ; their first book was published and was selling ; they were advertising themselves widely, and being advertised by friends and foes ; but as yet they had not been persecuted, and as yet they had not put very prominently forward any distinctive or special theology. They claimed to be prophets, but their mission, What was it ? What were they charged to proclaim ?

It was just about this time that the works of Jacob Boehm had begun to exercise a very great influence upon the visionaries in England. The *Mercurius Teutonicus* was first published in an English translation in 1649, and the *Signatura*

Rerum had appeared in 1651. Muggleton had certainly read these books, and as certainly turned them to account. The jargon of the German mystic was exactly what he wanted in his present state of mind, and there was that in the new philosophy which commended itself vastly to him. Not that he, as an inspired prophet, could for one moment admit that he had received any light from man or was under any obligation to anything but the divine illumination enlightening him directly and immediately ; but the obligation was there all the same, and to Jacob Boehm's influence we must attribute the evolution of the distinctive doctrine of the Muggletonians, which just about this time comes into obtrusive prominence.

It was at the beginning of the year 1653 that the prophets made their first important convert. Up to this time they had been heard of only in the back streets of London. But now a New England merchant named Leader, who had made a fortune in America, and had come back in disgust at the intolerance and persecution that prevailed among the colonists, made advances to Muggleton. Leader was in a despondent state of mind, and on the lookout for a religion with some novelty in it. He too had, it seems, been a student of Jacob Boehm, and

speculation to him. " His first question was concerning God—whether God, that created all things, could admit of being any form of Himself ? "

Prophets are never at a nonplus, and never surprised by a question ; the more transcendental the problem, the more need for the prophetic gift to solve it. In fact, the prophet comes in to help when all human cunning is at fault.

Accordingly Mr. Leader's question led to a discussion which is all set down at full for those who choose to read it, and as the result of that discussion comes out into clearness the astounding declaration which henceforth appears as the main article of the Muggletonian theology.

" God hath a body of His own, as man hath a body of his own ; only God's body is spiritual and heavenly, clear as *christial*, brighter than the sun, swifter than thought, yet a body."

Hitherto the prophets had been groping after a formula which might be their strength, but they had not been able to put it into shape. Jacob Boehm's mysticism, passing through the alembic of such a mind as Leader's, and subjected to that occult atmosphere which Muggleton lived in, came forth in the shape of a new theology, transcendental, unintelligible, but therefore celestial and sublime. The prophets from this moment made a new departure.

Meanwhile, the unhesitating and authoritative damning of opponents exercised a strange fascination over the multitude. Reeve and Muggleton lived among the blackguards at their first start, and they damned the blackguards pretty freely. In numberless instances the blackguards were to all intents and purposes damned before Muggleton's sentence was pronounced. They were fellows given over to drink and debauchery, sots who had not much life in them, scoundrels who were in hiding, skulking in the vilest holes of the city, whom the plague or famine would be likely to rid the world of any day. They died frequently enough after the sentence was pronounced, and it is quite conceivable that the sentence may have hastened the end of many a poor wretch who had nothing to live for. Nay, in more cases than one a timid man, when the sentence was passed, was so terrified that he took to his bed there and then, and never rose from it, or became insane, neglected his business, and so was ruined ; and as the number of the damned was always increasing, the chances of strange accidents and misfortunes would go on increasing also. People heard of these, and of these only.

What the prophets themselves did, it was only natural that their followers would try to do also ; indeed, it is wonderful that the damning prerogative

was not invaded much oftener than it was. It was very rarely intruded upon, however. Once, indeed, a misguided and too venturous believer named Cooper took upon him to usurp authority, and pronounced the sentence of damnation upon a small batch of fifteen scoffers who had jeered at him and the prophet's mission. The precedent was a dangerous one, there was no telling what it would lead to if such random and promiscuous damning was to go on. Next day Cooper fell grievously sick, and conscience smote him ; he could not be at peace till he had confessed his fault and been forgiven. He was forgiven accordingly, but he was admonished to lay to heart the warning, and to presume no more. " Not but that I do believe," says Muggleton, " they will all be damned," all the whole fifteen !

The movement was becoming a nuisance by this time, and Reeve got a hint, and no obscure one, that a warrant would be issued against him, " either from General Cromwell, or the Council of State, or from the Parliament." So far from being deterred by the prospect—was there ever a prophet who was frightened into silence ?—he declared that if Cromwell or the Parliament should despise him and his mission, " I would pronounce them damned as I do you ! " Though no warrant came from the Council or Cromwell—a matter much to be regretted—yet a

warrant was taken out by five of the opponents, and the prophets were brought before the Lord Mayor. As usual, a detailed account is given of the proceedings, which are valuable as illustrating the method pursued in those days in the examination of an accused person, and the procedure of the court—so very different from our modern practice. The prophets were committed for trial ; they refused to give bail, and were thrown into Newgate. It was the 15th of September, 1653, one of the great festivals among the believers. The hideous picture of prison life in Newgate deserves to be read even by those who have some acquaintance with the horrors of our prisons at this time. The prophets were well supplied with money, and so were spared some of the worst sufferings of the place ; but it was bad enough, in all conscience, and one night the two narrowly escaped being hanged in their own room, and were only saved by five condemned men, who came to the rescue. Muggleton says the highwaymen and *the boys* were most set against him ; one of the highwaymen, whenever he saw him in the Hall, " would come and deride at me, and say, " You rogue, you damn'd folks." And so it was with the boys that were prisoners ; they would snatch off my hat, and pawn it for half-a-dozen of drink. So the boys did, and I gave them sixpence every time they

did it, to please them." Highly gratifying to the boys !

While the two were in Newgate John Reeve wrote a letter to the Lord Mayor and another to the Recorder, mildly damning them both. If we are to believe Muggleton, the Recorder was somewhat disturbed and alarmed by the sentence. When the day of trial came, Reeve bade the Lord Mayor hold his peace and be silent, as became a damned man in the presence of the prophets, and we are told the Mayor obeyed and said nothing more. The two were condemned, nevertheless, and thrown into Bridewell for seven months. Under the horrors of that dreadful imprisonment Reeve's constitution broke down. He was never the same man again. He languished on, indeed, for four years more, but he was a dying man, and he spent his time in writing books, his followers kindly ministering to him in his broken health and feebleness. The end came to him while visiting some convents at Maidstone—good women, of course. " The one was Mrs. Frances, the eldest ; the second, Mrs. Roberts; the third, Mrs. Boner. This Mrs. Frances closed up his eyes, for he said unto her, Frances, close up mine eyes, lest my enemies say I died a staring prophet."

While Reeve and Muggleton were lying in New-

gate, another mystic—are we to call him a prophet too?—was lying in Carlisle gaol. George Fox, the Quaker, had fallen into the hands of Wilfrid Lawson, then High Sheriff for the county, who had not spared him. Just about the time that the London prophets were discharged, Fox arrived in London under the custody of Captain Drury, and had that memorable interview with Cromwell which readers of Fox's Journal are not likely to forget, though Carlyle has gone far to spoil the story by slurring it over.

It was a great event to the Quakers to have their leader in London. He had only once before been in the Metropolis—that was nine years ago—and then he had been "fearful," had done nothing, was tongue-tied, and had 'gladly escaped to itinerate among the *steeple houses* in the north. This time he had gained acceptance with the Protector. No man would meddle with him from henceforth or let them look to it! The Quakers were, of course, elated; they were going to carry all before them; they met to organize a grand campaign for proselytizing all England. The two *commissionated prophets* were by no means dismayed, by no means inclined to be outdone by the Quakers; they invited them to a disputation—a trial of the spirits, in fact. It came off, accordingly, in Eastcheap, and George

Fox was there, and with him two or three of his "ministers whom the Lord raised up." It is not a little significant that Fox makes no mention of this meeting in his Journal—significant because he never omits to speak of his successes, and never tells us anything of his failures. Nay, he studiously omits all mention of Muggleton's name throughout the Journal, and in his books against him indulges in really violent language. Muggleton, on the other hand, speaks of this discussion at Eastcheap as if it had been a serious check to the Quakers, and from this time to his death he never ceased to assail them with a resolute aggressiveness which indicates no sort of misgiving in his power to deal with his antagonists. The discussion, however, ended in Fox and his supporters—five in all—receiving the sentence of damnation from the two prophets, and from this moment there was internecine war between the Quakers and the Muggletonians; each denouncing the other fiercely, and issuing books against the other by the score—works which have happily been long ago forgotten, to the great advantage of mankind. If, however, any one, curious in such lore, is desirous of finding out what cursing and swearing, regarded as one of the Fine Arts, may achieve when skilfully managed by adepts, let him by all means turn to the pamphlets of Pennington,

Richard Farnsworth, and others of the Quaker body, while delivering their souls against Muggleton, and the counterblasts of Muggleton, Claxton, and their friends in reply. One of the choicest diatribes of these *esprits forts*, as we may well call them, was hurled at the prophet by William Penn.

Muggleton had some very zealous converts at Cork—for there were believers everywhere by this time—and as they were people of substance and much in favour, they were making some way. Of course they came into collision with the Quakers, and not without success. Penn had early fallen under the influence of Richard Farnsworth, whom Muggleton had damned in 1654, and Penn's father had sent him over to manage his Irish estates, in the hope of getting the new notions out of the young man's head. The experiment failed, and young Penn, now only twenty-four years old, had returned to England in 1668 as staunch a Quaker as ever. There was a leading man among the Quakers, Josiah Cole by name, whom Muggleton had solemnly damned ; he was in failing health, and he died a few days after the sentence was pronounced. The Muggletonians were jubilant, and some of the Quakers were disturbed and alarmed. Penn's heart was moved within him, and with all the fervid indignation of youth he stepped forward to draw

the sword of the Lord. He printed a letter to Muggleton which should reassure the waverers. It thundered out defiance. "Boast not," he says, "thou enemy of God, thou son of perdition and confederate with the unclean croaking spirits reserved under chains to eternal darkness. . . . I boldly challenge thee with thy six-foot God and all the host of Luciferian spirits, with all your commissions, curses, and sentences, to touch and hurt me. And this know, O Muggleton : on you I trample, and to the bottomless pit are you sentenced, from whence you came, and where the endless worm shall gnaw and torture your imaginary soul."

Muggleton replied with his usual coolness, and pronounced his sentence upon the young enthusiast. Neither was a man easily to be put down ; but whereas the prophet's followers were wholly unmoved by all the attacks upon them, the Quakers found the Muggletonians extremely troublesome, and it is impossible to resist the conviction that large numbers of the Quakers were won over to join the opposite camp. Nay, it looks as if Muggleton had really some strange power over the weaker vessels among the Quakers, and had actually *frightened* some of them. Writing in 1670, he says : "You are not like the people you were sixteen years ago ; there were few Quakers then, but they had witch-

craft fits, but now of late I do not hear of any Quaker that hath any fits, no, not so much as to buz and hum before the fit comes. But if you, Fox, Both know of any of you Quakers that have any of those witchcraft fits as formerly, bring them to me, and I shall cast out that devil which causeth those fits." The Quakers could hardly have been as angry as they were, nor their books have been so many and their writers so voluble during twenty years and longer, if Muggleton had not been a disputant to be dreaded, and a prophet with the faculty of drawing others after him.

In the whole course of his career, which extended over nearly half a century, Muggleton never found any difficulty in maintaining his authority over his followers. There were indeed two attempts at mutiny, but they were promptly suppressed, and they collapsed before they had made any head. The first was in 1660, shortly after the death of John Reeve. Lawrence Claxton, a "great writer" among the Muggletonians, had during Reeve's long illness come very much to the fore as an opponent of the Quakers, and his success had a little turned his head. In one passage of his writings he had taken rank as Reeve's equal and representative, and had put himself on a level with "the Commissionated." It was an awful act of impiety. "For," says

Muggleton, " as John Reeve was like unto Elijah,, so am I as Elisha, and his place was but as Gehazi, and could stand no longer than my will and pleasure was." Claxton had been formally blessed, therefore he could never be damned, but excommunicated he could be and was. He at once dropt out and we hear of him no more.

The second revolt was much more serious. " There were four conspirators in the rebellion . . . for which I damned two of them, and the other two I did excommunicate." This time the fomenter discord was a busy Scotchman. Muggleton calls him Walter Bohenan, which appears to be only a *phonetic* representation of Walter *Buchanan*. That so sagacious a seer as Muggleton should have been betrayed into associating himself intimately with a canny Scot is truly wonderful, and illustrates the eternal verity that " we are all of us weak at times," even the prophets. *Bohenan's* self-assertion led him on to *dizzy* heights of towering presumption, until at last " he acted the highest act of rebellion that ever was acted." It was all in vain ; he was cut off for ever — perished from the congregation ; utterly damned, and thereupon disappears, swallowed up of darkness and silence.

Muggleton lived twenty-six years after this last revolt, exercising unquestioned authority ; an auto-

cratic prophet to whom something like worship was offered even to the last. He was far advanced in his eighty-ninth year when he died. He was far on towards seventy when he was brought before Jeffreys, then Common Serjeant, and other justices, on a charge of blasphemy. Jeffreys was as yet a novice in those arts of which he became the acknowledged master a few years after, but already he quite equalled his future self in his savage brutality to the poor monomaniac. " He was a man," says Muggleton, " whose voice was very loud ; but he is one of the worst devils in nature." The jury hesitated to bring in their verdict, knowing well enough what would follow, but Jeffrey's look and manner cowed them. The prophet was condemned to pay a fine of £500, to stand in the pillory three times for two hours *without the usual protection to his head*, which those condemned to such a barbarous punishment were allowed. He was to have his books burned by the common hangman, and to remain in Newgate till his fine was paid. Only a man of an iron constitution could have come out of the ordeal with his life. Muggleton bore it all ; remained in Newgate for a year, compounded for his fine in the sum of £100, which his friends advanced, and was a free man on the 19th of July, 1677, a day which the Muggletonians observed as the prophet's Hegira.

As early as 1666 he had many followers on the Continent, and in that year the *Transcendant Spiritual Treatise* was translated into German by a convert who came over to London to confer with the sage. Except on very rare occasions he never left London, nor indeed the parish in which he was born. He pursued the trade of a tailor till late in life, but his books had sold largely, and he managed to get together a competence, and was at one time worried by his neighbours and fined for refusing to serve in some parish offices. There was a fund of sagacity about the man which appears frequently in his later letters, but an utter absence of all sentiment and all sympathy. He had no nerves—staid, stern, and curiously insensible to physical pain. He was absolutely fearless, with a constitution that could defy any hardships and bear any strain upon it.

When we come to the *teaching* of Muggleton, we find ourselves in a tangled maze of nonsense far too inconsequential to allow of any intelligible account being given of it. Jacob Boehm's mistiest dreams are clearness itself compared with the English prophet's utterances. Others might talk of the divine cause or the divine power or the divine person, "fumbling exceedingly" and falling back in an intellectual swoon upon the stony bosom of the Unknowable. Muggleton grimly told you that there

was a personal Trinity in the universe—God, man, and devil—and each had his body. If you pressed him for further particulars he poured forth words that might mean anything, a metallic jargon which you were ordered to receive and ponder. Such as it was, however, you had to accept or reject it at your peril. Why should an inspired prophet argue ?

Something must be set down to the circumstances **in** which he found himself, and to the dreadfully chaotic condition which the moral sentiments and religious beliefs of the multitude had been reduced to during the wild anarchy of the seventeenth century. There were two men in England who were *quite certain*—George Fox was one, Muggleton was the other. Everybody else was doubting, hesitating, groping for the light, moaning at the darkness. These two men *knew*, other people were seeking to know. George Fox went forth to win the world over from darkness to light. Muggleton stayed at home, he *was* the light. They that wanted it must come to him to find it. All through England there was clamour and hubbub of many voices, men going to and fro, always on the move, trying experiments of all kinds. Here was one man, " a still strong man in a blatant land," who was calm, steadfast, unmovable, and always at home. He did not want you, whoever you were ; he was perfectly indifferent to

you and your concerns. Preach ? No ! he never preached, he never cared to speak till he was spoken to. If you went to him as an oracle, then he spake as a god.

Moreover, when the Restoration came and the high pressure that had been kept up in some states of society was suddenly taken off, there was a frantic rage for pleasure, which included the wildest debauchery and the most idiotic attempts at amusement. Then, too, the haste to be rich agitated the minds of all classes ; Westward ho ! was the cry not only of Pilgrim Fathers but of reckless adventurers of all kinds. From across the sea came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, and ivory, and apes, and peacocks, and a thousand tales of El Dorado. Muggleton the prophet, with that light brown hair of his and the dreamy hazel eye and the resolute lips, waited unmoved. Pleasure ? If he wondered at anything it was to know what meaning there could be in the word. Riches ? What purpose could they serve ? To him it seemed that the Decalogue contained one wholly superfluous enactment ; why should men covet ? There would have been some reason in limiting the number of the commandments to nine ; nine is the product of three times three. Think of that ! This man in that wicked age must have appeared to many a standing

miracle, if only for this reason, that he was the one man in London who was content, passing his days in a stubborn rapture, as little inclined for play or laughter as the sphinx in the desert, which the sand storms can beat against but never stir.

So far from Muggleton's influence and authority growing less as he grew older, it went on steadily increasing ; there was a mystery and an awe that gathered round him, and latterly he was regarded rather as an inspired oracle than as a seer. The voice of prophecy ceased ; he had left his words on record for all future ages, but from day to day his advice was asked, and people soon found it was worth listening to. In the latter years of his life his letters dealt with the ordinary affairs of men. People wrote to inquire about their matrimonial affairs, their quarrels, their business difficulties, whether they must conform to this or that enactment of the State, how they might outwit the persecutors and skulk behind the law. Muggleton replies with surprising shrewdness and good sense, and now and then exhibits a familiarity with the quips and quirks of the law that he can only have acquired by the necessity which suffering had laid upon him. His language is always rugged, for he had received little or no education ; he is very unsafe in his grammar, but he has a plain, homely vocabu-

lary, forcible and copious, which, like most mystics, he was compelled to enrich on occasion, and which he does not scruple to enrich in his own way. His style certainly improves as he gets older, and in these letters one meets now and then with passages that are almost melodious, the sentences following one another in a kind of plaintive rhythm, and sounding as you read them aloud, like a Gregorian chant. He died of natural decay, the machine worn out. His last words were, " Now hath God sent death unto me." They laid him on his bed, and he slept and woke not. Nearly 250 of the faithful followed him to his grave. It is clear that the sect had not lost ground as time moved on.

Not the least feature in this curious chapter of religious history is that the Muggletonians should have survived as a sect to our own days. As late as 1846 an elaborate index to the Muggletonian writings was issued, and the *Divine Songs of the Muggletonians*, written exclusively by believers, show that there has been a strange continuity of composition among them, and that, too, such composition as ordinary mortals have never known the like of. Yet Muggleton never broke forth into verse. Joanna Southcott could not keep down her impulse to pour forth her soul in metre ; Muggleton is never excited, the emotional had no charm for him. So, too, he

never cared for music, he makes no allusion to it. Nay, he speaks slightly of worship, of prayer and praise, especially of congregational worship. It was allowable to the little men, a concession to the weak which the strong in the faith might be expected to dispense with sooner or later. For himself, isolated and self-contained, he could do without the aids to faith which the multitude ask for and find support in.: He held himself aloof ; he had no sympathy to offer, he asked for none ; nay, he did not even need his followers, he could do without them. The question for them was, Could they do without him ? For more than two centuries they have kept on vehemently answering No !

Of late years a class of specialists has risen up among us who have treated us to quite a new philosophy—to wit, the philosophy of religion. To these thinkers I leave the construction of theories on Muggleton's place in the history of religion or philosophy ; to them, too, I leave the question of what was the secret of his success and power. Much more interesting to me is the problem how the sect has gone on retaining its vitality. Perhaps the great secret of that permanence has been that Muggleton did not give his followers too much to believe or too much to do. He disdained details, he was never precise and meddlesome. If the Muggle-

tonians wished to pray, let them ; to sing, there was no objection ; to meet together in their conventicles, it was a harmless diversion. But they must manage these things themselves, and provide for difficulties as they arose. It was no part of the prophet's office to make bye-laws which might require to be altered any day. Thus it came about that the sect was left at Muggleton's death absolutely unfettered by any petty restraints upon its freedom of development. The believers must manage their own affairs. There is one God and Muggleton is His prophet—that was really the sum and substance of their creed. That followed on a small scale which is observable on a large scale among the Moslems, the prophet's followers found themselves more and more thrown back upon their prophet till he became almost an object of adoration. The creed of Islam without Mahomet would be to millions almost inconceivable ; the Muggletonian God without Muggleton would not be known

Says her Royal Highness, looking over My. shoulder, " You have written quite enough about those crazy, vulgar people. It's all old world talk. There are no prophets now ; there never will be any more."

No more prophets ! The *prophetical succession* never stops; never will stop. When Muggleton died Emanuel Swedenborg was a boy of ten ; twenty years afterwards the new prophet was walking about London just as the old one had done, living the same lonely life, conversing with the angels and writing of heaven and hell and conjugal love, and—well, a great deal else besides ; and, odd coincidence, it was in that same Eastcheap where Muggleton had damned the Quakers in 1653 that the Swedenborgians held their first assembly in 1788, just about the same time that Joanna Southcott came to London, and before Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were born or thought of. No, no. The prophets are not improved off the face of the earth.. They never will be. They will turn up again and again. You can no more hope to exterminate them by culture than you can hope to produce them by machinery. *Propheta nascitur non fit*. For once her Royal Highness was wrong.