

Giles Firmin's Quaker Library

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Shalford minister Giles Firmin, a New England returnee, narrated that his congregants gave him twelve Quaker books. From Firmin's footnotes in his anti-Quaker tract, *Stablishing Against Shaking* (1656), we can determine that Firmin carefully read these books; the books he read are listed. His two main Quaker sources were London-based James Nayler and imprisoned James Parnell, the most prominent Quaker in Essex; George Fox was absent from Firmin's library. This suggests a fleeting time in Quaker history and geography when, in Essex in the south of England, Nayler was seen as the chief Quaker authority and threat, followed by Parnell. Soon after Firmin's publication, Parnell died in prison and Nayler suffered scandal, so that Quaker profile became obsolete.

George Fox and Edward Burrough responded to Firmin. This article details various similarities that Firmin drew between Quakers, and by contrast, Catholics, Baptists, and New England Antinomians. Burrough made a rejoinder to the alleged Baptist connection, and Fox defended Quaker views without reference to any other sect.



In *The Light in their Consciences*, historian Rosemary Moore, discussing the books that travelling Quaker ministers carried with them, instances the Puritan vicar Giles Firmin and his congregation in Shalford, Essex in the south-east of England, as people affected by the aggressive spread of Quaker published works: ‘Firmin had hoped it would be possible to ignore the Quakers in his parish, but “they would trouble me, sent divers of their books in to our town, invited my people to come and hear, and prevailed with some to hear.”’¹

In his preface ‘to the reader’ in his anti-Quaker work, *Stablishing against Shaking*, Firmin states that his congregants brought him twelve Quaker works that had come into Shalford.² We can determine, from close perusal of *Stablishing against Shaking*, what happened to these books once they were delivered to Firmin. Thirteen Quaker books were footnoted in *Stablishing against Shaking*³ (plus *Foot out of the Snare*, by ex-Quaker John Toldervy⁴); these were presumably the books given to him by members of his congregation. Most can be identified with a high degree of certainty. For the ten books that have Thomason dates of publication,⁵ these vary from July to November (or December) of 1655. Thus, the books, at least in their entirety, could not have been given to him prior to late November, or more likely December. For a list of these books, see **Table A**, below.

Presumably, Firmin took these books and studied them carefully, with the purpose of rebutting them. He then delivered a sermon against the Quakers on 17 February 1656. This sermon was enlarged for publication in *Stablishing against Shaking*. Firmin’s tract was probably published in March or April.⁶ We do not have the vicar’s original sermon text for comparison, but *Stablishing against Shaking* must represent the fruits of his

¹ Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2020), 127. For more on Quakers in Essex, see Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society, 1655-1725* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

² Giles Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking* (London: Printed by J. G. for Nathanael Webb and William Grantham, 1656), unnumbered front pages.

³ Eleven extant Quaker books, one extant work by a former Quaker, and two books that are not extant are mentioned in Firmin’s book.

⁴ Firmin specifically mentioned the book by Toldervy and clarified that it was not among the twelve Quaker books that he received from his congregation. Firmin, *Stablishing*, unnumbered front pages.

⁵ George Thomason was an English bookseller who amassed an extensive collection of English publications between the years 1640 and 1661. He also wrote the dates of purchase on their covers. This extensive collection survives to the present, having been presented to the British Museum in 1761 by George III, and thus a date close to the publication date for many books from this period can be determined by consulting George Thomason’s data. ‘George Thomason’, *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

⁶ Someone (Thomason himself, probably) wrote a date of August 28 on the extant copy, but that would not be near the date of the original printing, since Burrough’s reply was dated 26 July 1656. I would date its publication no later than April, because the author seems not yet to know about James Parnell’s death on April 10.

Thomason Date	Author	Short Title
7 July 1655	James Parnell	<i>The Watcher</i>
17 July 1655	James Nayler	<i>A True Discovery of Faith</i>
3 September 1655	James Nayler	<i>A Salutation to the Seed of God</i>
1 October 1655	James Nayler	<i>An Answer to ... Francis Harris</i>
19 October 1655	James Parnell	<i>Fruits of a Fast</i>
2 November 1655	Martin Mason	<i>A Check to the Loftie Linguist</i>
27 November 1655	James Parnell	<i>Goliahs Head Cut Off</i>
28 November 1655	[Richard Farnworth]	<i>The Priests Ignorance</i>
7 December 1655 ⁷	George Bishop	<i>Jesus Christ, the Same To day ...</i>
24 December 1655 ⁸	John Toldervy	<i>Foot out of the Snare</i>
Quaker Books Referenced by Firmin, but lacking a Thomason Date:		
Date	Author	Short Title
1654, reprint 1655	Anonymous	<i>The Glorie of the Lord</i>
1655	William Dewsbury	<i>The Discovery of Man's Return</i>
1655	Christopher Fell	<i>A Few Words to the People of England</i>
No date	Wooddrove	Unknown

Table A: Giles Firmin's Library of Quaker Books.

thinking and writing on Quakerism of those few months, cogitation that likely began in December or January of 1655. Careful attention to Firmin's source notes, then, can inform us as to how Firmin and his Essex congregation viewed Quakers in the crucial first few months of 1656, and the Quaker literature on which they based their opinions.

Brief Biography

Firmin was a Suffolk native and a graduate of Emmanuel College, part of the University of Cambridge, these locations all in the east of England. He was a practising physician. He lived in New England on two occasions, the first from 1632 until 1633, and then later from 1637 until 1644. In 1644, he travelled back to England, and survived a shipwreck off the coast of Spain. He was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1648, and he

⁷ The Thomason date is as recorded here. If the handwritten date written on my electronic copy was by Thomason, it appears to me that the date may actually be November rather than December.

⁸ This was an anti-Quaker tract written by a former Quaker. Firmin recognized the difference between Toldervy's work and the other books on this list, but he used it in *Stablishing against Shaking* for its account of Toldervy's Quaker period. It was not one of the books disseminated by Quaker evangelists. See also footnotes 4 and 7.

subsequently became the vicar in the town of Shalford in Essex. He lamented that Essex was ‘the deadest County in all the Nation’, full of ‘Gospel-glutted professors’.⁹ Firmin sought a stricter ministry; he believed that the Lord’s Supper was given out to too many people, and that ministers were too willing to baptise children of parents who were leading ungodly lives in contradiction to their supposed Christian faith. Among Puritans, Firmin remained strongly committed to the Church of England, condemning all Separatist Puritans. He would be ejected from the ministry after the enactment of the Act of Uniformity in 1662, but he continued to lead worship among his flock in Essex with the connivance of the local magistrates.¹⁰

The Quaker movement, having first attained critical mass in the North of England in 1651 and 1652, came to Essex around 1655. Probably the leading personality in the Quaker mission to Essex was the teenaged James Parnell, who came to the county in April and was imprisoned in Colchester Castle in July. In his *Journal*, George Fox recollected attempting to visit Parnell in prison during his ministerial visit to Essex. If he was successful, it was only for a short time, because the jailer would ‘hardly’ permit Fox to ‘come in or stay with’ Parnell.¹¹ As we have seen already, only after several months of Quaker proselytising and dissemination of tracts did the reluctant Giles Firmin allow himself to be drawn into the dispute with Quakers.

How Did Firmin and Shalford Residents See Quakers in 1655 and 1656?

Since Firmin’s assemblage was a direct result of book collection by a community, not just a single person, it furnishes us with some useful information as to how some Shalford residents and Firmin understood Quakers in 1655 and early 1656.

James Nayler and Parnell were represented as authors in the collection by three books each; the other authors were represented only by a single publication. Firmin knew of Nayler as a national leader, and Parnell as a leader in Essex. The vicar appears to have known the local Quaker leader better than the national one, based on his more numerous personal references to Parnell. Nothing he said about either man was complimentary. Sometimes Firmin lumped them together. Commenting on one of Nayler’s books and one by Parnell, he acidly stated: ‘See if it be not a woeful judgment of God to let a Nation be overrun and people catched, with such witless, brainless fellows, besides their gross abominable principles, that destroy Scriptures,

⁹ N. H. Keeble and G. Nuttall, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, letter 192, quoted in N. H. Keeble, “Firmin, Giles,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19: 636.

¹⁰ Giles Firmin, ODNB.

¹¹ George Fox, *Journal*, ed. by John L. Nickalls (London: Religious Society of Friends, 1975), 214.

Ordinances, Churches, civil states, etc.’¹² Both Nayler and Parnell, absurdly in Firmin’s opinion, characterised themselves as ‘perfect men without sin.’¹³ Personal comments about Parnell focused on his youth, his alleged blasphemy, and his ‘abominable pride’. In regard to Parnell’s comments about the outward sacraments, Firmin dismissively stated that ‘I will not transcribe his babbling.’¹⁴ Firmin does not appear to have shown sympathy for Parnell’s condition as a prisoner at any point. His writing had many more footnotes to Nayler and Parnell’s works than to any other Quaker. He footnoted Nayler seventeen times and Parnell, fifteen; the next most often he footnoted any Quaker was Martin Mason at five times. (See **Table B**, below.) Firmin’s consciousness of all things Quaker was heavily dominated by Nayler and Parnell.

Quaker Author	Number of times source noted in Firmin’s work	
James Nayler	17	Represented by three publications
James Parnell	15	Represented by three publications
Martin Mason	5	
Richard Farnworth	4	
George Bishop	4	
John Toldervy	3	
Anon., Glorie of the Lord	2	
Wooddrove ¹⁵	2	
Christopher Fell ¹⁶	1	
William Dewsbury	1	

Table B: Footnotes to Quaker Works in Giles Firmin, *Stablishing against Shaking*.

Another striking feature of this carefully annotated text is that the name of George Fox appears nowhere in it, nor are there any mentions of Fox’s work. This is despite the fact that, as mentioned above, Fox actually visited Essex in 1655. Firmin’s reference to ‘Fell’ cannot be a reference to Margaret Fell’s 1655 work, *False Prophets*; it is, in fact, a reference to Christopher Fell’s 1655 work, *A Few Words to the People of England*;¹⁷

¹² *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 48.

¹³ *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 41.

¹⁴ *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 32, 41–42.

¹⁵ Refers to an author whose work is not extant, and who is otherwise unidentified.

¹⁶ For more on Christopher Fell, see the dialogue between Stephen Angell and Euan McArthur, in this issue.

¹⁷ Firmin’s reference referred to page 5 of a book by ‘Fell.’ But the 32 word quotation does not match any text in Margaret Fell’s *False Prophets*. It does match Christopher Fell, *A Few Words to the People of England* (London: s.n., 1655), p. 5. See *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 30.

accordingly, there appears to have been no mention of any writing by a Quaker woman in Firmin's texts, whereas there are dozens of references to books written by Quaker men.

Nayler was not exalted above Fox in any other text published by New England returnees in the 1650s; only in Firmin's book was that the case. Minister Francis Higginson, from Westmorland, the epicentre of Quaker mission work in 1652 and 1653, referred to Fox and Nayler as 'Satan's seeds-men', and in more fine-grained detail, described Fox as the 'Father of Quakers of these parts' and 'the Ring-leader of this Sect', while he described Nayler as 'the principall spokesman [for Quakers] in these parts.'¹⁸ Minister Thomas Weld of Newcastle also knew about Fox and Nayler, describing Fox as the Quakers' 'grand master.'¹⁹ In his tract against Quakers, minister Samuel Eaton of Dukinfield and Stockport did not refer either to Fox or Nayler, but only to local Quakers.²⁰ Thus, the prominence that Firmin gave to Nayler was extraordinary, indeed unprecedented, among his fellow New Englanders filling ministerial positions in the North of England during the 1650s.

But Parnell's and Nayler's high fame among English non-Quakers was also transitory. Firmin gave his sermon with these two men as the authorities for the theology he was decrying in February of 1655/6. Less than two months later, Parnell died a few miles away from Shalford in Colchester Castle, succumbing to ill-treatment by his gaolers and, according to the inquest, excessive fasting. Nayler's ride into Bristol and subsequent trial by Parliament and brutal punishment placed Nayler largely into the shadows as a religious authority. (See **Table C**, below.)

Firmin's acerbic tract against Quakers would earn a reply tract from early Quaker leader Edward Burrough, published in July 1656. Burrough's tract had a single mention of Nayler (using his initials) and none of Parnell.²¹ By the time Fox himself replied to Firmin's tract in *The Great Mistery of the Great Whore Unfolded*, published in February 1659, Fox passed over in total silence Firmin's numerous mentions of Nayler and Parnell.²² There was no need for Fox to address their writings. Moreover, it is doubtful than anyone from 1659 onwards would overlook Fox's status, as the title of a recent biography has it, as 'first among Friends.'²³

¹⁸ Francis Higginson, *A Brief Relation of the Irreligion of the Northern Quakers* (London: Printed by T. R. for H. R. at the sign of the three pigeons in Paul's Churchyard, 1653), 1–3, 18.

¹⁹ Thomas Weld et al., *The Perfect Pharisee under Monkish Holinesse* (Gateside: Printed by S.B., 1653), 27; Rosemary Moore, 'Leaders of the Primitive Quaker Movement,' *Quaker History* 85 (Spring 1996): 29–44 at 37.

²⁰ Stephen W. Angell, 'George Fox's *Great Mistery* and the New England Returnees,' unpublished manuscript, based on his reading of Samuel Eaton, *The Quakers Confuted* (London: Printed by R. White for Thomas Brewster, 1653).

²¹ Edward Burrough, *Stablishing Against Quaking* (London: Giles Calvert, 1656), 37. The Thomason date for this book was July 26, 1656.

²² George Fox, *The Great Mistery of the Great Whore Unfolded* (London: Thomas Simmons, 1659), 114–120.

²³ H. Larry Ingle, *First Among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Ca. Apr. 1655	James Parnell came to Essex and preached at numerous locations, including Colchester, Felstead, Stebbing, Halsted, and Witham.
Late Jun. 1655	James Nayler came to London. Nayler was the chief spokesperson for Quakers in London for the next nine months.
12 Jul. 1655	Parnell was arrested at Coggleshall and imprisoned at Colchester Castle in Essex; the jury acquitted him, but he was fined 40 pounds, something he could not or would not pay. He was visited by George Fox and many other Friends.
Jul. to Dec. 1655	Quaker itinerants, possibly including Martha Simmonds, ²⁴ brought numerous recently published Quaker tracts into Essex, including at least three by Nayler and at least three by Parnell.
Dec. or Jan. 1655/6	Giles Firmin's congregation in Shalford in Essex brought a dozen Quaker tracts to him. He studied them in order to refute them.
17 Feb. 1655/6	Firmin preached a sermon against Quakers in his home pulpit.
Mar. or Apr. 1656	Firmin's anti-Quaker tract <i>Stablishing Against Shaking</i> , based on his February sermon, was likely published about this time.
10 Apr. 1656	Parnell died in Colchester Castle at the age of nineteen.
22 Apr. 1656	Edward Burrough arrived in London to assist Nayler.
Jun. 1656	Nayler travelled to Yorkshire. There were disputes in London between those who favoured Nayler's ministry and those who favoured Burrough's ministry.
26 Jul. 1656	Edward Burrough's <i>Stablishing Against Quaking</i> replied to Firmin's tract.
Aug. 1656	Nayler travelled west to visit George Fox in his imprisonment at Launceston, and he did not get far. He was arrested and imprisoned in Exeter.
20 Sept. 1656	Fox, released from prison, met the still-imprisoned Nayler at Exeter in an unsuccessful attempt to work out their differences.
24 Oct. 1656	Nayler rode into Bristol accompanied by a small party of Friends and was arrested and charged with blasphemy.

Table C: Chronology of 1655–1656 Activities of Giles Firmin, James Nayler, and James Parnell.

Firmin's Arguments

Firmin's tract was a broad-ranging engagement with Quaker teachings in the mid-1650s, and he demonstrated that there existed a wide gulf between contemporary Quaker teachings and his own Presbyterian views. We might list Firmin's concerns within the tract as follows: Quakers taught that the system of state tithes was unchristian; Quakers held incorrect views of the Light of Christ and the light of nature; Quakers taught people to forsake the Scripture; Quakers destroyed the institutions of Christ, such as the Church; Quakers denied the great work of redemption in Christians' hearts; Quakers encouraged Christians to omit their duty to pray; Quakers taught human beings

²⁴ Simmonds worked with Parnell in Essex in 1655 and was imprisoned at Colchester. Moore, *The Light in their Consciences*, 39.

to say that they could have no sin, thereby realising perfection; Quakers taught people to revile ministers in the Churches of Christ; Quakers bragged of spiritual infallibility; Quakers harassed sound Christians with their charges that they were engaging in sin; and Quakers engaged in shaking. Edward Burrough and George Fox, in *Great Mistery*, vigorously contested all Firmin's charges.²⁵

Fox decried the 'wolfish spirits' of Firmin and his fellow Puritan ministers, and chided, 'You have gotten the sheep's clothing upon your backs', adding some apocalyptic language about hailstorms and plagues drawn from the Book of Revelation.²⁶ While the comparison to wolves in sheep clothing is a Biblical one,²⁷ the more immediate allusion was to an autobiographical story in Firmin's work. As Firmin was travelling from Spain to England after his shipwreck,

We had two sheep aboard our ship, which were brought that we might have fresh meat by the way: when one of the sheep was killed, the Sea men put the skin of the sheep over the dogge which belonged to the ship; the sheep that was left alive, would continually follow the dogge, where the dogge lay down, the sheep would lye down by him, and would not leave the dogge, though the dogge would guerne [growl] at the poor sheep.²⁸

Fox was contesting Firmin's allegorical interpretation of this tale. Firmin stated that Satan disguised himself as an angel of light, and that Satan resembled the sheepskin-covered dog in his story. Quakers were then also like the Satanic wolfish figure disguised by an innocent sheep's skin.²⁹ Fox implicitly accepted the basic structure of this metaphor, but then he turned it against Firmin and the Puritans. The latter were the wolfish figures deceptively covered by the sheepskin, and they were the 'false prophets and antichrists.'³⁰

The Quaker movement in England reminded Firmin of Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian controversy that had convulsed Massachusetts during his years there. The Bostonian Hutchinson was a theologically informed housewife who convened well-attended Monday meetings at her home to critique the Sunday sermons of Boston's Puritan ministers. Her main criticism was that they focused too much on a

²⁵ Burrough, *Stablishing Against Quaking*; Fox, *Great Mistery*, 114–120.

²⁶ See, e.g., Revelation 16:21.

²⁷ Matthew 7:15: 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravening wolves.' (Authorised Version) Between Quakers and Puritans, there is a high level of contention as to whom this verse applies.

²⁸ Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 16–17.

²⁹ Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 17.

³⁰ Fox, *Great Mistery*, 155.

‘covenant of works’; she would wish most of them to preach more about God’s grace and goodness, as, she alleged, her two favourites did, John Cotton and her brother-in-law John Wheelwright. Castigating her as an ‘Antinomian’, her opponents, including Massachusetts governor John Winthrop, brought her to trial in 1637 and convicted her of heresy when she maintained that her teaching came via immediate revelation from the Holy Spirit. In 1638, she was forced into a Rhode Island exile and she died in 1643.³¹ Firmin’s comment was as follows:

The work of inherent holinesse which maketh us new Creatures, is a distinct thing from Christ his person; though among our *New-England* notions, this was received when the errours raged there, that Christ was the new creature; but for the 2 Cor 5:17³² they made miserable Grammar of the verse, undertaking to be the Interpreters of the Originall, read it thus, *if any man be in Christ the new Creature*, and thus indeed Christ being perfect, no wonder the Quakers are perfect, for there is nothing in them but Christ.³³

Fox made an extensive reply to this portion of Firmin’s text, although passing over any reference to New England. He singled out another part of Paul’s same letter, 2 Cor. 13:5 (‘Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?’), while upholding a Quaker interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:17, ‘Where Christ is, he is not without righteousness.’ Making clear his strong disagreement with Puritan doctrines about the utter depravity of all humankind, Fox asserted, ‘While any sin is standing, all things is not made new.’³⁴

Firmin rendered a subtle portrait of the religious constellation of the mid-seventeenth century, more subtle than his Quakers respondents (who ignored those parts of his work), or, indeed, most other English people. Quakers were often compared to Catholics, or more specifically Jesuits, in part because Quakers and Catholics defended spiritual infallibility in different forms, and perhaps because both Quakers and Catholics were seen as having a more optimistic theological anthropology than most Puritans.³⁵ Firmin made these sorts of comparisons. Other English authorities then went on to assume that Quakers must have been directly influenced by Catholics or

³¹ ‘Anne Hutchinson’, *American National Biography*.

³² Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (Authorised Version)

³³ Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 35.

³⁴ Fox, *Great Mistery*, 117.

³⁵ Moore, *The Light in their Consciences*, 94.

were secretly themselves Catholic.³⁶ Firmin made no such assumptions, as was evident in the following dismissive aside, after Firmin contended that Christ's righteousness is not inherent within human beings: '[Robert] Bellarmine³⁷ makes difference between the satisfaction of Christ, by which we are pardoned, ... and that righteousness by which we are justified; this he saith is inherent in us. But I dare not accuse the Quakers of being guilty of so much knowledge, and I presume that you do not aime at his doctrine'.³⁸

Firmin did situate Quakers with Separatists and Baptists, in the English religious landscape. Firmin noticed how the religious sects that were most strongly opposed to the Church of England quarrelled mightily among themselves. He decried 'the practice of the Separatists (with these Quakers) who have cast off the soundest Ministers, and all our Churches. It is observable how these Quakers, who have done the most mischief to the Separatists and the Anabaptists societies doe tell them, *they are in Babylon*; that which they have cast upon us is now cast upon them.'³⁹ Firmin was ready to heap coals of fire on the heads of the Separatists, whom he blamed for the rise of Quakerism, and who often themselves regarded Quakers with abhorrence: 'Look to it, ye Separatists, that have cast off the Ministry with so much scorne, at your dore must lye the cause why so many persons are turned Quakers.'⁴⁰ Sometimes Firmin implicitly compared Quakers to the even more radical Familists (Family of Love), when he declared that the Quakers he had read 'have spoken confusedly, and covertly' about 'being Christed with Christ, Godded with God,' a notorious Familist phrase.⁴¹

To the extent that these radical groups owned the Scriptures, Firmin was ready to vindicate the rightful existence of at least some churches in the Church of England, from which, ironically, he would be ejected from the ministry in less than a decade: 'I will leave this with all the Quakers, Seekers, Separatists in England, that if they will own the Church of Corinth to be a true Church, then I will prove there are now many Churches in England that are true also.'⁴²

Fox never commented on Firmin's eagerness to posit and rhetorically exploit what he saw as religious family resemblances among England's radical sects. Burrough did comment on Firmin's furtive relationship with a fellow New England returnee,

³⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Quakers' Catechism* (London: Printed by A.M. for Thomas Underhill, 1655), C3-D2.

³⁷ Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) was a noted Catholic theologian and clergyman, a native of Italy, a Jesuit, and, in 1599, a cardinal. In 1930 he would be declared to be a saint. 'Robert Bellarmine,' *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Vol. 2, p. 816.

³⁸ Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 36.

³⁹ Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 13–14.

⁴⁰ Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 18.

⁴¹ Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 34; Euan David McArthur, *James Nayler and the Quest for Historic Quaker Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 23.

⁴² Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 43.

Seventh-Day Baptist Thomas Tillam:⁴³ ‘Though T. Tillam be, or was, an Anabaptist, and contrary to thee [Firmin] in his opinion; yet if he will give a bubbling stand against us, thou wilt believe him, and call him a Minister.’⁴⁴ One implication of Burrough’s statement is that the Separatists and Baptists were much more akin to Firmin’s Presbyterianism, than to any seventeenth-century manifestation of Quakerism. Indeed, Firmin and Burrough’s assertions about Separatists and Baptists did not entirely contradict each other, as Separatists and Baptists were an in-between grouping with similarities to both the Presbyterians and Quakers.

Conclusion

In his own conclusion, an exasperated Firmin charged his congregation to ‘come not neer’ the Quakers ‘so much as to hear them, ... but if you will doe it, know assuredly, the Church will proceed against you for so doing, as for any other sinne.’⁴⁵ Similarly, Burrough and Fox heaped apocalyptic vitriol on Firmin for what they saw as his misrepresentations of Quakers. What all three works demonstrated beyond doubt was that the gulf between Quakers and Firmin’s variety of Puritanism was wide indeed. In the dichotomous rhetoric of the time, one side condemning the other as Satanic or the antichrist was understandable.

This Research Note, however, seeks to penetrate beneath the polemic. The university-educated Firmin frequently brought scholarly precision to his literary engagement with Quakers. Accordingly, this note attempts to make the case that there is much to be learned about the Quakers of the mid-1650s by attending to Firmin’s details. If we do so, we enter into a fleeting world where the teenaged James Parnell dominates the imagination of the residents of Essex, where James Nayler is more present in Puritan consciousness than George Fox, and where (alarmingly for Firmin) heresies that he believed he had left behind in New England seemed to be surfacing in old England. Neither Burrough nor Fox crafted a narrative in response that had the scholarly apparatus of a Firmin, but in nearby Kent, a university-educated Baptist named Samuel Fisher was becoming a convinced Friend in 1655 and 1656, and his erudition would match or even exceed that of scholars like Firmin.⁴⁶ Thus, university-educated persons

⁴³ Firmin published Tillam’s negative account of an experience of Quaker worship, identifying him only as “a minister now in Essex,” and Burrough, in reply, took it upon himself to reveal Tillam’s name. Firmin, *Stablishing against Shaking*, 55–56; Burrough, *Stablishing against Quaking*, 31; ODNB.

⁴⁴ Burrough, *Stablishing Against Quaking*, 31.

⁴⁵ Firmin, *Stablishing Against Shaking*, 54.

⁴⁶ Stephen W. Angell, ‘Renegade Oxonian: Samuel Fisher’s Importance in Formulating a Quaker Understanding of Scripture,’ in Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, eds., *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 145–148.

on both sides of the Quaker debate, despite the scorn that their university educations aroused in Quaker contemporaries, would make a significant mark in their vigorous debates from the mid-1650s onward.

There is a lot to be learned by closely examining the ways that Firmin used his Quaker library. For that reason, I recommend close study of Firmin's *Stablishing Against Shaking* to other scholars of Quakerism, and of religion during the Interregnum.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

