DISPUTE AND PRINT IN CAMBRIDGE, 1659

Throughout the 1650s and 1660s, Cambridge appears to have been a focal point for Quaker disputes. As early as 1654 Thomas Firmin wrote a pamphlet called *The First New Persecution: or a True Narrative of the Cruel usage of two Christians, by the present Mayor of Cambridge.* Firmin recounts the imprisonment the previous year of two Quaker women by the Mayor, William Pickering, for preaching to the scholars. Firmin asks his audience to question whether their punishment of being whipped 'untill the blood came' is in any way justifiable given that 'by what Law [this was permissible] no man knows'. The prose validates its title of *Cruel usage,* depicting its protagonists as almost martyrs who, far from wincing from the pain, embraced their sentences, praising God in song throughout. The intention behind this pamphlet is clear: Firmin's pro-Quaker (his contemporaries describe him as Socinian), emotive narrative is designed to appeal to the populance through its portrayal of two innocent females being debased by a corrupt authority. What is most interesting about this pamphlet is the pains which Firmin takes to ensure his readers that William Pickering alone is responsible for the events described, indeed the postscript is solely concerned with clarifying this issue, and therefore exonerating the Cambridge Justices of playing any part in the proceedings. Kate Peters identifies that the experiences of Mary Fisher and Elizabeth Williams were instrumental to the latter reception of Quakers in Cambridge, as their plight had established the invaluable sympathy of local justices. The printer of this work was Giles Calvert, whose relationship with Quaker-related pamphlets was in its infancy, though his association with the movement soon led to his shop being referred to as an apothecary's selling soul-poison. Having first published Quaker writings in 1653, by 1654 thirty of his thirty-eight published works were by Quakers, which comprised forty-seven per cent of all known Quaker publications that year. Though not a Quaker himself, Firmin's use of the rapidly established Quaker-printer is further proof of his support of Quaker toleration.

The reception of Quakers in Cambridge was far from welcoming. Between 1657-59, Gerard Crose provides the following account:

> the students in the University of *Cambridge* had not yet

> sufficiently insulted over, and exercised their Rage against the Quakers; they therefore at this time reassumed their former Licentiousness, Wantonness, and Impudence, and did not alone, but accompanied with the Populacy and meaner sort of People, that are ready for all audacious, facinorous and vile doings several times, but more especially thrice break into the Quaker Meeting, and Assault them, after they had broke the Locks and Doors with great Hammers, and break all things with their Hands and Feet to pieces, frighten some of the Men away, use others basely, and throw Dirt and such like filth in the Faces, beat others with sticks tear their cloaths, prick and wound them with Knives till the Blood gushed out, others they haled cruelly by the hair of the Head, and having so done, let them down and soaked them in Ditches, and the Kennels of the Street; neither did they spare any of them, had no regard to any Age, nor Sex, nor Degrees of Men, for when an Alderman came to them the second time they were engaged in this Work.

It is the repetition of such violence that is most striking about this account, and the general fear of the spread of Quakerism was quite unfounded with regards to the actual numbers of Quakers in Britain. Barry Reay speculates that in 1660, while comprising the largest radical sect, Quakers represented less than one per cent of England's total population. The reaction of the Cambridge students thus seems wholly exaggerated to the actual 'threat' of Quaker domination, and this statistic makes their impact so much more remarkable. William C. Braithwaite states, 'clearly, in the two universities, the Quaker message, with its scorn of human learning, would only find utterance amid much persecution'. Quakers were concerned with the leadings and promptings of the spirit,. nor were they in the least hesitant about sharing their opinions with the population at large.

Ivan Roots remarks that 'Quakers did not withdraw from the world, they wanted to change it', which would account both for the discussion which occurred in Cambridge in 1659, and for the pamphlets which were subsequently published in response to this debate. It was in 1659 that Thomas Smith compiled a pamphlet called *The Quaker Disarmed, or A True Relation of a Late Publick Dispute held at Cambridge\By Three Eminent QUAKERS, against One Scholar of Cambridge\WITH A Letter of Defence of the Ministry, AND AGAINST LAY-PREACHERS, ALSO Several Queries proposed to the Quakers to be answered if they can,* in which he recounts his version of a debate he had with George Whitehead, George Fox and William Allen. As with the title of Firmin's pamphlet, Smith chose evocative language for his own title, which immediately gives the reader an indication as to the forthcoming content of the text. Smith was clearly preoccupied with the injustice that he alone argued against three others, especially as he had only engaged himself to argue against Whitehead, and in the text records that he said,

> I came not hither to dispute with *Fox* or *Allen;* but since you are resolved to dispute three of you against one, I shall reply to you all (yea if there were three hundred, if you speak but one at once)

The interposed comments of Fox and Allen in the debate which was intended to be a dialogue between Whitehead and Smith alone was indeed unfair, especially as it took place in the meeting-house as the mayor was uneasy about such a discussion taking place in the town-hall. The detail that the Scholar argued against three Quakers simultaneously proclaims a self-satisfied pride that he managed, in his own mind at least, to refute the arguments of all them combined. Yet it is the final three words of the pamphlet's title which can afford the modern reader a small smile: *Several Queries proposed to the Quakers to be answered if they can* (my emphasis). Whether Smith included this antagonist sentiment in the certainty that his queries could not be satisfactorily answered, thereby reinforcing his own superiority in debate, or because he belatedly recalled a number of issues after the discussion had taken place which he then wished he had made to support his point of view is now a matter of conjecture, but what is irrefutable is that his words were considered to be a thrown gauntlet, and the challenge was not to go answered: it has been suggested that Smith's pamphlet was in fact a challenge issued to John Bunyan, whom he had encountered preaching in a barn outside of Cambridge in May 1659, but Bunyan did not directly respond to this pamphlet. Smith had previously encountered Whitehead preaching at Westminster, and had attempted to engage him in debate, but had been forced to withdraw fearing 'the Q. would do him a mischief'.It may have been this frustrated incident which prompted the Cambridge librarian to confront Whitehead when the latter was preaching on 25th August 1659 in the meeting-house in Cambridge. Smith records that he was prompted to write a note the following day suggesting to the Mayor of Cambridge that he and Whitehead engage in a public debate as he (Smith) had reflected 'how apt silly Women were to be led captive by such deceivers'. This voiced altruistic intention fails to mask Smith's enjoyment of engaging in a dispute in which he clearly felt he had excelled.

Smith notes that, as he had not been given any details as to the location of the debate by Saturday 27th August, he sought out the Mayor to discover what had been the result of his proposition. His account reads, 'next day, Aug. 29.' he received a letter from Whitehead suggesting they met at the meeting-house; Whitehead dates his missive '29th. of the 6th moneth'. The dating of these communications appears to be inconsistent. Smith's 'next day' could be explained as being the next working day, taking into consideration that such discussions would be deemed inappropriate on a Sunday, but I have been unable to account for Whitehead's description of August as being the '6th moneth'. The discussion began an hour or so after Smith received Whitehead's note and commenced with what appears to have been a somewhat heated argument about the heretical nature of Whitehead's preaching. Smith asserted that 'You who writ this book are a Papist', holding Whitehead accountable for the content of a written tract with an evocative comment which intimates the ever-present fear of the spread of Papism in the population. The discussion continues by focusing on Whitehead's understanding of the Trinity, and the refusal of Quakers' to swear oaths, and in total Smith records forty-seven (often overlapping) points which were raised. Hammond remarks Smith's account illustrates opposing forms of rhetorical debate: Smith, the scholar, repeatedly using a syllogistic form of arguing in comparison to the Quakers' 'imaginative theological language'. This form of argument is consistent with the education which Smith received; William T. Costello records 'more peculiar to scholasticism that the lecture was the disputation, a debate between students on the matter learned in the lectures or privately from tutors'. It is highly probably that Smith received such an education during his time at Christ's College, and was therefore well-practised in the art of public debate.

Yet it was not a Quaker, nor Bunyan, who first responded to Smith's pamphlet, but the Baptist Henry Denne. The title of his pamphlet is equally revealing about the nature of its content – *The Quaker No Papist, in Answer to The Quaker Disarm'd. or, A brief Reply and Censure of Mr. Thomas Smith's frivolous Relation of a Dispute held betwixt himself and certain Quakers at Cambridge.* Given the generally hostile attitude towards Quakers at this time, it is curious that Denne so quickly leapt to their defence, yet he does so vigorously, vilifying Smith with phrases such as, 'to punish in print so disgraceful a Combat, and to fill the world with a victory so ignoble, what is it for him to glory in his own shame?' Denne's diatribe – which rather amusingly includes condemnation of Smith's egocentric divulgence of what text he was engaged in studying before hearing Whitehead preaching in Cambridge – primarily concerns itself with the issue of whether or not it is lawful for Christians to swear oaths. It was Whitehead's refusal to swear the Oath of Abjuration which formed the basis of Smith's argument that Whitehead was a Papist. Denne argues that it is inherently wrong to force men to swear this oath as,

> it is swearing a thing to be false, which for ought he knows may be true; it is exposing a mans self to evident peril of taking a false oath, and thereby of committing a most grievous and heinous sin in the sight of God.

and he holds the government responsible for trying to force this issue. Denne's final gambit shrieks of patronising moralism, and could easily be interpreted as being solely intended to rile Smith; 'I have onely to desire him (at parting) to consider how much an over acting zeal oftentimes obstructeth sound judgement'. A postscript to the main body of the text is even more inflammatory, calmly requesting Smith to consider the two points which Denne provides to demonstrate how Smith's behaviour smacks of Papism:

> I will not say you are a Papist; it should be too much contrary to Charity, considering what you profess. But this I do say, that you give more cause of suspicion that way, than any thing you have objected against George Whitehead.

This carefully phrased appeal to Smith's 'better judgement', could equally be seen as a calculated provocation to Smith's clearly fiery temper. Indeed, Smith's reaction to Denne's work was swift and reactionary, resulting in a scathing pamphlet entitled *A Gagg for the QUAKERS/WITH AN ANSWER TO M*r*. DENN'S Quaker no Papist.* In this work, Smith tackles another aspect of debate, and the discussion progresses to questioning whether it is acceptable to have Protestant clergy. Yet always at the heart of these tirades are personal attacks on individuals accusing them of being a Papist. In his address *To The Reader,* Smith insinuates that Denne has Papist inclinations, but it is his biting sarcasm about Denne's scholastic ineptitude which encourages his audience to continue reading:

> if your leisure will not permit you to read the whole be pleased (for a tast) to peruse the 58, 59 and 60th § of the letter to Mr Den. and the 14th and 16th pages of the Queries.

He then instructs his audience to 'beware of wolves in sheeps-clothing'. Smith's thinly veiled accusation that Denne has not read

The Quaker Disarm'd is made explicit later in the text, 'one reason why I think you have not read the *Quaker Disarm'd*, is because you put a case and three queries in your 4th page, which are answered in the letter to Mr. E § 35', and this pedantic approach to refuting Denne's arguments replaces the more refined syllogisms of his earlier pamphlet. Also in this work Smith makes numerous references to Biblical passages – a technique he had not employed in his previous text, and one of which Quaker preachers were very fond. It can therefore be interpreted that Smith chose in this pamphlet to imitate the argument structure most frequently employed by the Quaker movement proving that he could overcome their arguments using their own methods.

Smith's sarcasm litters this pamphlet, and almost reduces this serious discussion to a farcical comedy: 'I am glad to meet with a man that hath read *ALL the books of Papists in those times, and ALL their Histories*... I entreat you to cite not *all* of them (though the more the merrier)'. This pamphlet also seems to have been more hastily constructed than Smith's previous publication, and this public wrangle necessitated the reader's knowledge of what had passed before. Indeed it would have been difficult for the audience to fully appreciate the full force of Smith's argument in this work as he frequently makes reference to precise points of paragraphs of Denne's pamphlet, suggesting that the reader must have had a copy of this pamphlet before them when they read Smith's second offering. This assumption on the part of Smith reveals an interesting insight into his supposition of the nature of his relationship. Smith adopts a degree of familiarity with his audience, as indicated by his references to his first pamphlet and that of Denne's. He expects the reader to be wholly familiar with the arguments which have gone before, which could be construed as being a fairly arrogant assumption given the relatively limited circulation of such pamphlets. But perhaps to endow Smith with arrogance is to do him a disservice; the circulation of pamphlets after publication has not yet been fully traced, perhaps individuals distributed them amongst a select group which could mean that the next instalment of this exchange of printed animosity was anticipated with the same relish as today's media intrigues.

Perhaps one of the reasons that Cambridge was a focal point for Quaker activities was that it was there that pastors were trained 'under great leaders...to give their lives for their people'. If Quakers could convince these trainee pastors to connect to their inner light, then the spiritually leaderless population could, possibly, be more easily converted. Hugh Barbour also suggests that Oxford and

Cambridge appealed especially to young northern Quaker preachers, as they presented 'virgin territory' for Quaker conversions which, he proposes, was attractive to these young enthusiasts. Early Quakers have been described as being 'far more radical' than their modern counterparts, and possessed a religious zeal for spreading the Quaker message which is not discernible in modern Friends. Braithwaite states that the volume of printed literature concerning Quakers can be understood by 'the zest with which Friends threw themselves into public disputing and polemic [which], is, in fact, only another evidence of the large claims and wide ambitions of early Quakerism', and Barry Reay records that one of the means of accomplishing this global aim was to provide Quakers entering a new area were with a list of separatists who resided in that area, as these were the most likely candidates for conversion, Barbour asserting that experienced Quaker preachers were required primarily in London and Bristol. Though he explains that such experienced leadership was distributed amongst new meetings as well, it is interesting that such high-profile figures as George Fox, George Whitehead and William Allen should all have been present at the debate with Thomas Smith. Whether this was accidental or intentional, given Smith's reaction to Whitehead preaching in Whitehall, cannot be conclusively ascertained, but the fact that all three were present to refute the arguments of one of the most influential academics of the day is worthy of comment. If their presence was pre-arranged, it was an unfair strategy to effectively 'gang up' upon Smith, but the benefits of winning the debate may well have swayed their decision about what constituted just tactics. However, if the presence of these three men was coincidental then our understanding of their characters makes it impossible for us to believe that Fox and Allen would not interject their own comments into a publicly held 'private' discussion. It is speculative, but reasonable, to suggest that Cambridge became a focal point of Quaker attention for such a motive; to have decisively demolished Smith's arguments would have sent ripples through the academic and theological communities, thereby materially strengthening the Quaker position. Peters identifies the years 1652-3 were crucial in establishing a system for the spread of Quaker ideas, and argues that Quakers were a very visible, highly organised, self-conscious and homogeneous movement, conscientiously presenting 'an identifiable, national movement, to which all displaced or disillusioned Independents and separatists could belong'. Her belief in the organisation of the movement supports the proposal that it was not mere coincidence which brought together three such influential

Quakers in Cambridge at this time, especially as her research has revealed that Cambridge had been a Quaker target since the arrival of Mary Fisher and Elizabeth Williams in 1653.

The printing and distribution of pamphlets has long been established as playing a key role in the establishment of the Quaker movement. By 1659, Margaret Fell's residence, Swarthmore Hall, was the administrative centre of the Society. Fox's desire to tighten his hold on the direction in which the society was moving led to his request that all material for publication be first sent to Swarthmore Hall for validation, which (if the text were approved) then advanced money to cover the cost of printing in London. Such regulation of printed material necessitated an intricate network to enable the transportion of the tracts, yet Henry Denne was not a Quaker. His religious reliefs and choice of printer strongly indicates that he did not follow Fox's desired method of regulation. Rather than approaching Giles Calvert, Denne chose Francis Smith to be the printer of his pamphlet, which provides evidence to support Hammond's assertion that Thomas Smith's original intention was to provoke a response from Bunyan. Francis Smith became the principal publisher of Bunyan's work, and Denne's preference for his printing house implies a connection, however circumstantial the evidence may appear. In a time when the government was cracking down upon the content of published texts, the choice of printer was crucial. Printing-houses which produced inflammatory works were subject to fines, closure or the imprisonment of their owners, so printers tended to be somewhat discerning in their choice of material. When Denne could be almost guaranteed that Calvert would have published his work, it is interesting that he chose rather to patronise the printing-house of Francis Smith,who was Bunyan's printer of choice.

Norman Penney's collection of documents which chart the introduction of Quakers throughout England and Wales shows that the years following this exchange of pamphlets,Quakers were still being violently abused in Cambridge. While it was unlikely that the debate between Smith and Denne would have significantly changed the attitude of the Cambridge populance towards Quakers and Quakerism, the level of hostility which was still encountered by individuals is surprising – one record claiming that there was 'rejoyceing to se us beaten', and stating quite wonderfully that 'heare all may see what moudie waters this fountayne of Cambridge streams forth'. Edward Sammon's 1659 pamphlet, *A Discovery of the Education of the Schollars of Cambridge; by Their Abominations and wicked Practises acted upon, and against, the Despised People, in scorn called*

QUAKERS, is a catalogue of grievances against individuals. Sammon accuses the 'Savage Schollers' of Cambridge of following the practices of Oxford Scholars, 'which two Places are called the...Fountains of Piety, and Nurses of Virtue: Now see whether...their People are bred up in filth, and to fithyness as their Actions and Fruits declare it to all People'. Sammon's wonderfully impassioned fire and brimstone style of writing accuses Thomas Smith of playing his part in rousing the crowd to atrocities, 'there hath been almost a whole streetfull of them hollowing and tearing of Us, and the Keeper of the Library in *Cambridge*, hath boasted of these and such like Actions at the Schollers'. It is then apparent that Quakers of 1659 believed themselves to be persecuted by, and themselves targeted, two main protagonists; Thomas Smith, the Librarian and William Pickering, the Mayor. Pickering's motivations for wishing the speedy and permanent removal of all Quakers from his jurisdiction are easily identified and largely justified. The peaceful methods of communication which are nowadays associated with Friends were generally unknown to the first Quakers. Their presence in an area resulted in public disruptions of organised religious and secular events, and often led to civil unrest amongst the local population. Pickering's stance of zero tolerance on all matters regarding Quakers was, arguably, the rational response to dealing with such disruptions. Thomas Smith's vehement and outspoken dislike of Quakers was largely the result of theological differences of opinion. His social status and education clearly made him feel responsible for, and capable of, publicly refuting Quaker theology, and consequently Quaker practises. Such vociferous and easily identifiable public figures made them a logical target for Quaker attacks, which only fanned the flames of religious intoleration.

The early Quaker movement quickly organised itself into a highly efficient system of networks. Targeted campaigns at key locations was soon established as an effective means of spreading the Quaker message. As a university town, and therefore extolling the virtue of contemplation though, lamentably, also being a centre of promoting human-learning, Cambridge was an obvious choice for a sustained Quaker campaign. Beginning in 1653, Friends consistently converged here in attempts to convert the populance from hierarchical religion to exploring the promptings of their inner light. Such an aggressive operation resulted in frequent altercations with powerful Cambridge figures who were as systematically and rigorously trying to exterminate the movement as Quakers were to establish it. Public debate and printed tracts rapidly became identifiable methods of spreading and strengthening the Quaker movement. The public debate between Thomas Smith, George Whitehead, George Fox and William Allen is most notable for the high profile of these men. Whether we choose to condone Fox and Allen for unfairly conspiring against Smith, or applaud the fervour which prompted them to support their Friend and religious beliefs, their presence at the debate had a marked effect upon Smith, who chose to consolidate his position and continue the debate in a printed, rather than verbal, form. It was not until 1660 that Whitehead penned his own response to Smith's pamphlet, and it is surprising that it was a non-Quaker who offered the first rejoinder; perhaps the peripatetic nature of many early Quakers hindered a rapid response to printed tracts. Denne's defence of Quaker principles suggests both his sympathy with Quaker theology and his antagonism towards Smith, either due to his symbolic representation of authority, or on a personal basis. If Bunyan was truly the intended recipient of Smith's first attack, he spared no pains in his attempts to humiliate Denne and to repudiate his arguments. The relatively detached tone of *The Quaker Disarm'd* is replaced in *A Gagg for the Quakers* by a biting sarcasm and directs its comments less at wide theological issues and more at attacking Denne as an individual.

The pamphlets of 1659 give us an insight into the political and religious debates which were important to the English population at the time. It is entertaining to see the progression of an educated and intelligent man from a carefully constructed series of syllogisms, digress to the petty rivalry of a now personal vendetta. Yet the greatest interest of this collection of three pamphlets is that though they were written about Quakers, they were not written or published by Quakers. The influence which the movement had upon the general psyche of the nation can be established from this fact alone. Quakers were no longer a disorganised rabble, but a force to be reckoned with, debated with and written about.

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