

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation - Europe's House Divided 1490-1700*, London, Allen Lane for Penguin, 2003, £25.00.

Diarmaid MacCulloch has a gift for writing clear and compelling narrative history, and his *Reformation* will provide the standard introduction to the subject for many years. He weaves together the diverse strands of religious change across the later denominational boundaries with exemplary skill, and lively sketches of character give a human depth to his portrayal of ecclesiastical history. He is not afraid to take long views. This gives his analysis a breadth of sympathy which perceives "reformation" as a process that involved all the churches under papal jurisdiction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One might however question whether the Europe he frequently invokes is not something of an anachronism. It was Western Christendom which was decisively fragmented by the processes of reformation. The tragic process left its heirs with nothing more than a residual geographical expression - Europe - unable to confer identity or inspire loyalty. If "Europe" is still marked by the divisions of religious strife, it is itself the creation of that conflict.

MacCulloch divides his massive work into three parts. 1570 separates the two sections of his narrative, and the third part traces the social implications of the religious change. The narrative and analysis of the origins and development of the Reformation to 1570 are masterly and show an extraordinary command of complexities, which in other hands might simply bewilder. He seems less at home and perhaps less excited by the developments after 1570, although on his own showing this was the crucial period when division became irreversible. By comparison this second part seems hurried. It finds no place to examine the catholic intransigence of Pascal or the repudiation of Calvinism by the Cambridge Platonists in the very college that had been founded to propagate it.

He obviously enjoyed writing the final section on patterns of life, particularly the chapters on love and sex, but it might have been better if the social analysis had been developed in a separate volume. As it stands one has the uneasy sense that a major scholarly work has been literally "sexed-up". He allows us to enjoy the salacious gossip of the Reformation, but sheds little light on the explosion of ribald and scurrilous polemic that the invention of printing seems to have released. More seriously he provides only occasional glimpses of the economic dimension of the changes that the Reformation brought about. One would barely guess that the period saw a massive change in European land ownership unparalleled since the barbarian invasions. In this respect MacCulloch displays an almost clerical disregard for the ecclesiastical consumption of resources.

Quaker readers will appreciate the sympathetic treatment of the radical aspect of the Reformation, which helps to place the origin of the Religious Society of Friends in a wider European context. They may also reflect on the spectacular failure of good will to overcome religious rancour. Despite outstanding personal examples of sweetness and light, they seem to have lacked the energy and the ability to overcome the power of passionate intransigence. This sorry tale of western Christendom unable to discover or deploy the political resources to overcome its own conflicts raises disturbing questions about the religion and society we have inherited. As Christians and Europeans today endeavour to heal old wounds, the precedent suggests that such opportunities are not only rare - they require a benevolent providence to be realised.

Graham Shaw

Josiah Langdale: *A Quaker Spiritual Autobiography*. By Gil Skidmore, Reading, The Sowle Press, 1999. pp27.

Josiah Langdale (1673-1723), *A Quaker Spiritual Autobiography*, is an admirable example of the search for spiritual fulfilment of an early Friend. In this slim volume, Gil Skidmore first provides a useful biographical introduction and then prints a full transcript of Langdale's autobiographical account of his life. It has been preserved in the Friends House Library since 1934, when it was bought from an American bookseller. It has not been published before. It appears to be a later copy of an eighteenth century text.

Josiah Langdale did not have an easy childhood. Born in Nafferton in the Yorkshire Wolds in 1673, his father died when he was eight. His mother remarried when he was fifteen, leaving him to find his own way in the world as a farm labourer. He found the solitary life of a ploughman congenial to his contemplative nature. It was through his Quaker employer, David Milner, and particularly his wife Sarah, that he first became involved with Friends. He had been brought up an Anglican but found no spiritual solace from the Established Church. After much soul-searching and attempts by his family and his local priest to deter him, he found his spiritual home among the "people of God", honest, virtuous, serious and caring people as he described them. His conviction was complete after his first attendance at Meeting by his own choice. He then experienced a call to the Ministry and was to travel widely in both Britain and the American Colonies. He married a fellow Quaker, Margaret Burton, in 1710, when he was thirty-seven. They had two children. In 1723, they set sail together for America but sadly Josiah died at sea. He was only forth-nine.

Such are the bare bones of his life. But the manuscript of his autobiography provides a very much more fascinating account of his spiritual odyssey. He describes in graphic detail his disappointment at his confirmation by his local Bishop, when after the laying on of his

hand, he "found no strength that I had received to my soul". He bares himself unreservedly when he gives an account of his subsequent search for grace and his discovery of Friends whom he "loved...because they were love-worthy". Josiah Langdale's autobiography, naïve and simplistic though it is, remains today a moving document. Gil Skidmore is to be commended for rescuing it from oblivion.

Christopher Booth.

***Scott of Amwell: Dr Johnson's Quaker Critic.* By David Pearman. Rockingham Press Ware, Hertfordshire 2001. Pp. 368. Illustrated. £28 (hardbound).**

David Pearman has written a substantial book about John Scott of Amwell (1731-1783), Friend, poet, reformer and grotto builder. It is well illustrated. Unusually it comes in two editions, casebound with notes, a bibliography, a fourteen page chapter containing unpublished poems (five sonnets and two others, one certain and one probable) and an index or paperbound without any of those important elements. While most of the notes simply cite the sources of statements or quotations in the text some are more extended. Pearman suggests that Scott is best remembered now for the grotto and asks 'But what was a Quaker doing building a grotto?' (there were others, for example built by a member of the Brassey family at Roxford near Ware and by Thomas Goldney in Bristol). It features quite largely in this book and its illustrations and Pearman explains its place in the eighteenth century fashion for follies, grottoes and the picturesque which connects with Scott's literary work.

Scott emerges less clearly as a Friend than in his other roles from Pearman's account, perhaps reflecting the information available rather than Quakerism's importance in Scott's life. However it is made clear that Scott was untypical as a Friend in his tastes, interests and pursuits whether in poetry, the appreciation of paintings, his love of music, public life and politics or the grotto. Yet in public life and his poetry Scott did demonstrate the kind of concerns appropriate to Friends if in less usual ways, two of his better poems were odes written against military recruiting and privateering. Scott's circle included other Friends who were well known outside the Society, Lettsom and Dimsdale for example. He was a fifth generation Friend, his brother Samuel was both more conventional and more prominent within the Society, a source of coolness between them if not tension. There was family wealth which came from a business as maltsters and Pearman is illuminating on the Quaker maltsters of Ware and Southwark. Scott was clerk of his monthly meeting on more than one occasion, attended monthly meeting regularly at other times besides his own meeting for worship and took his share of the other tasks that fell to Friends for example several times being appointed to visit Friends whose behaviour was unsatisfactory. Perhaps more unusual were his membership of the Great Amwell Parish Vestry and his ready adoption and defence of the usage Esquire which his friend and correspondent Joseph Cockfield firmly declined. Pearman

describes how Scott took offence when his Quakerism was derided in a published criticism of his poems. There is an affecting account of his last days, especially the final conversations with his brother drawn from his brother's writings (and widely available later to Friends also in *Piety Promoted*, the ninth part). So Scott though untypical in many ways was a committed Friend whose last words were an example to others and who attended yearly meeting in his last year. He was one of a number whose lives contradict the assumptions of an almost totally quietist Quaker eighteenth century.

Scott's involvement in public affairs was more extensive than that of most of his contemporaries amongst Friends. His aims, if not his participation in controversy and politics, were largely consistent with Friends' beliefs and causes. He made a serious and solid if not innovative contribution to contemporary discussions of the poor law system, served on turnpike trusts, published the useful *Digests* which contained a summary of the law and practical advice on road building (perhaps his major concern and interest in local and national public affairs) and expressed his opinions publicly on the evils of corruption, gambling, cruelty to animals and capital punishment. Several of his publications were more political and Pearman undertakes a fairly detailed examination of the opposing pamphlets by Scott and Samuel Johnson (who was otherwise on friendly terms with Scott and visited the grotto). Scott also took issue with Johnson on his *Lives of the Poets*.

Scott does rank among the many minor English poets of the eighteenth century the best of whose works deservedly survive in many anthologies. His published output was not great, partly because of his standards and, one assumes, the sheer amount of his other activities. Small parts of it, most frequently the short poem 'Ode on hearing the drum', have appeared steadily in a variety of anthologies, general, dealing with Quaker verse or of topographical poetry. Both his *Poetical Works* (1782 and two other eighteenth century editions) and his *Critical Essays on Some of the Poems of Several English Poets* (1785) were reprinted in 1969. Pearman gives a good deal of space both to Scott's verse and to discussion of its genesis and prolonged revision. While he may seem to overvalue Scott's poetry he does ask why he 'could turn out poem after poem of banal imagery and diction'. The earlier biography of Scott by Lawrence D. Stewart (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956) is perhaps better on the criticism of Scott's poetry and literary output but Pearman's thorough research has discovered previously unknown letters and poems.

All in all Scott's achievements were relatively minor but worth narrating. They are of interest to specialists in the various fields that absorbed his energies, their unusual conjunction in one eighteenth century Friend has been worth study. David Pearman has brought together a good deal of unfamiliar information. He quotes extensively from unpublished materials, at times he is repetitive and could perhaps have been selective. His account of Scott may be read more by local historians than others and must be a valuable contribution to

Hertfordshire history as well as a useful portrait of a Friend from a period not well served by modern biographies.

David J. Hall

"Cowards" by Marcus Sedgwick

Hodder Children's Books 2003 £4.99 ISBN: 0340860618

A sealed train speeds through the night around the outskirts of wartime London in 1916. As it passes through a dimly-lit station without stopping, a note is thrown out on to the platform. What is happening to the men on board? Why do they have to resort to such a desperate method of contacting their loved ones?

Marcus Sedgwick is primarily a children's writer, but please do not let this put you off reading this compelling true story about two brave First World War conscientious objectors, as he calls them "the men who refused to fight". In fact this makes it an even more powerful read. As we all know children are often very discerning critics and I think you will agree that the sooner they can come into contact with peace issues and pacifism of this nature the better. However, my only real criticism is that the inclusion of illustrations, photographs and some statistical graphs would in my view have made this an even more readable and accessible book to children and adults alike. Marcus Sedgwick's most recent novel, *The Dark Horse*, a mysterious magical legend set mythically in Icelandic saga country was short listed for the prestigious Carnegie Children's Book Award 2003.

Marcus had actually set out to write a novel about the subject, but after extensive research initially at Friend's House Library and ironically much more fruitfully at The Imperial War Museum, he changed his mind and wrote a non-fiction book instead with a real human interest dimension. I met Marcus recently when he was promoting his new book at a Hodder Publishers event for School Librarians in Euston Road, London. In my capacity as both a Secondary School Librarian and a Quaker I quizzed him about his connections and interest in Quakers. He told me that his father and his grandfather were both CO's during the Second World War and that his grandmother is in fact herself a Quaker. He is interested in Quakerism but does not attend meeting. I noticed that there is reassuringly, a definition in the Glossary and also seven page references in the index to the Quakers.

The book tells the poignant, courageous personal story of two ordinary working men who were both Londoners. Alfred Evans, was an apprentice in a piano factory and Howard Marten was a bank clerk and many of his family including his father and acquaintances were Quakers. The author was accustomed to doing historical research for his novels; but he was very surprised at how difficult it was to find plentiful and reliable sources of information about World War 1 CO's and how

little there was to be found before the trail ran cold. His key sources were two transcripts (one written, one spoken) made around the 1960's by the men while they were still alive.

Surprisingly there were as many as 16,500 men (and possibly some women) who claimed a conscientious objection to fighting in the First World War. I had been unaware just how severely they were treated. Not only were these brave and principled men scorned, reviled or insulted by almost every other member of their society and subjected to constant daily verbal abuse, for instance the word "conchie" short for conscientious objector was shouted at them in the street. They were also often stopped and handed a white feather - the sign of cowardice. This handing of a white feather may account for why many people are still resistant to the use of white poppies around Remembrance Sunday. Ideally to prevent offence I tend to try and wear both a red and white poppy together. The red one to remember those who died in both World Wars and the white one to signify hope for the future and support for peace initiatives.

Not only were they subjected to verbal abuse of this nature but CO's lives were also at risk daily on account of their pacifist stance, especially after they were sent to France on a ship as prisoners when nobody knew what else to do with them. They were treated with extreme cruelty and the conditions were inhuman and harsh. Howard says:-

"We were forever being threatened with the death sentence. Over and over again we'd be marched up and read out a notice: some man had been sentenced to death through disobedience at the front. They had the power to"

In fact thankfully and due to a set of amazing coincidences and lucky breaks both Howard and Alfred lived to tell their tale and at no time did they compromise their strongly held conviction that war was wrong and they would take no active part in it.

The book reminds us that at the outbreak of war the Quakers devised and circulated a Declaration on the War to all their Meetings, stating that "all war is utterly incompatible with the plain precepts of our divine lord". Also at this time, as we know, the Friend's Ambulance Unit which provided ambulance services on the front line, and the War Victim's Relief Committee, which brought food and medicine to civilian victims of the war across France and Belgium were set up, or took up new service.

I would recommend this book to anyone who has an historical interest in the sparsely documented treatment of First World War CO's. or in the motivations and background of these ordinary and exceptionally brave young people who stepped out of the mould and paved the way for our present day peace movements and the much more extensive CO presence in the Second World War. It is a short and simple introduction

to a complex and little researched subject area. Also, this book is a must for our individual Quaker Meeting's libraries for both children and adults to read. It could act as a powerful vehicle for outreach, as the story straddles both the Quaker and the non-Quaker approaches to the Testimony for Peace in the troubled and violent times we all live.

Some suggested websites:-

www.ppu.org.uk/learn/infodocs/cos/st_co_wwone.htm

www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWpacifists.htm

www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWco.htm

Alison Wallace