

## QUAKERS AND THE INQUISITION

The story of the missions of Friends to convert the Sultan and the Pope is a treasured part of the heroics of early Quakerism, more particularly the adventures of John Perrot, John Luffe, Mary Fisher, Katharine Evans and Sarah Chever. Correcting earlier accounts, William Charles Braithwaite tells it with some fullness in *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, in the second half of chapter xvi ('Work Beyond Seas'). More recently Kenneth Carroll has made himself an authority on John Perrot, who has also attracted the attention of Nigel Smith; but any treatment of the missionaries' reception, including their examination by officials of the Inquisition, has been slight and dependent on Quaker sources, in particular on *This is a short relation of some of the cruel sufferings (for the Truth's sake) of Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, in the Inquisition in the Isle of Malta ...* (1662). Now Dr. Stefano Villani, of the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa, has conceived the idea of investigating Italian sources, including the archives of the Inquisition, to discover the ecclesiastical perception and reception of the missionaries and to redress the balance, and is in process of publishing his findings. *Tremolanti e Papisti: missioni Quacchere nell'Italia dei Seicento* (Rome: edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1996, pp. 264) is the first fruits of his research.

I am not acquainted with the relevant secondary Italian literature, nor am I in a position to know the status and reliability of the Inquisition's archives or the canons governing their elucidation; but I know Stefano Villani from much correspondence and conversation. He is an exceptionally keen and dedicated young scholar, of marked originality, who leaves no stone unturned in his investigations. The university higher degree procedure in Italy is not the same as ours; but by British standards, of which I have some experience, it is astonishing that work so full, careful and original should be no more than the 'titular' dissertation required in order to qualify ('perfezionando') for a larger 'official' thesis. Of course Stefano Villani is not 'at home' in the British Isles as he is in Italy (on p. 73 he thinks Minehead is in Ireland and calls the Lord Mayor of London the Major-General), and, though his coverage of secondary sources in English is astounding, it would be too much to expect him to

distinguish between what is reliable, what is not reliable and what must be treated with caution; but he is as familiar with the Quaker archives at Friends House as he is with those of the Inquisition, and he has the skill to inter-relate them in a way that illuminates both the power of a laser-like beam, concentrated and limited.

English readers may wonder why so much space is given to describing a background they know already; but the book was written for an Italian readership ignorant of it. If they also wonder whether what is fresh in the book might not have been better presented in a series of articles in learned journals, they will be pleased to hear that what is presented in the book is in fact filled out and extended in a number of articles published or forthcoming, including a study of James Nayler.

Stefano Villani is not setting out, however, to become a Quaker historian. *Tremolanti e Papisti* is in a series with the very general title 'Uomini e Dottrine', and is intended only as preparatory to a very small part (about a twentieth) of a grand project in which Stefano Villani will survey the reception of the English Revolution in Italian culture and society. Quakerism, that is to say, is not his particular interest; nor for that matter is history, if in this is included the why and the wherefore. His particular interest is archival: he has an eye to, a nose for, fresh material in manuscripts and in rare and inaccessible tracts; and when he finds this he prints it, and not a historian's interpretative selection of passages but the whole document or tractate. What he prints may confirm or contradict what is already in print; this is not his concern; exposition and significance he leaves to others.

By way of illustrating his work and its value I append three brief passages printed without annotation in Part II ('Tesi') of *Tremolanti e Papisti* (pp. 169-224): the first from *The Tryal of John Luffe*, from what in a manuscript at Friends House purports to be a transcript of it as printed in 1661, though no published copy of it has been found; the second and third from the official account of the examination of Sarah Cheevers and Katharine Evans in the Inquisition's archives in Malta. They will be found on pp. 175-6, 209 and 216.

'When he came into the Pope's presence, not makin[[...]] beysance or so much as pulling off his hat, his Holynes asked him what country man h[[e w]] as, to whome he replyd "thou speakest not the language of the holy, yet, because I well understand thee know thou o Prince sitting in thy Statly array, I am of the new Jerusalem from all Eternity"; with that he presented the Pope a booke entituled y<sup>e</sup>

*Mystery of truth.* The Pope shooke his head at him ... At this y<sup>e</sup> Quaker laughed and sayd ... "... Every day is a sabbath wherein wee can serve God". "Very well", sayd the Pope, "and is there nothing to be done for the remembrance sake of our Saviour's blessed Ascention?". "No, no," replyed John Love, "I have Christ about me and in mee, and therefor cannot choose but remember him continually".'

'Interrogata de nomine, cognomine, parentibus, patria, aetate et Religione.

Respondit: mi chiamo Sara figliola delli quondam Gulielmo Shenel. et Margarita moglie di Henrico Scivers, dalla provincia di Willshiere e dalla Villa Slatenfoord in Inghilterra, hò l'età d'anni 50 in circa, sono della vera Religione de Purificati, sebene quelli che non sono di questa Religione per dispreggiarci ci chiamano della Religione quakers cioè de tremolanti.'

'Interrogata ut recenseat Dogmata saltem principalia suae sectae. Respondid: Primieramente Noi di detta setta de Tremolanti crediamo in Giesù Christi, e che lui sia il vero lume del Mondo; e che morto in Gierusalemme, et il 3<sup>o</sup> giorno riuscì da Morte.

Di più non admettemo Sacramento alcuno nella nostra setta, poi[[ché]] nella Sacra Scrittura non vi è luogo alcuno che facci mentione delli sacramenti.

Di più detta nostra Setta non admette né veneratione, né Invocatione, né intercessione de Santi poiche solamenta Iddio si deve venerare, et Invocare.'

*Geoffrey F. Nuttall*

The following Italian publications have been received from Stefano Villani, a postgraduate student of the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa;

- 1) Book: *Tremolanti e Papisti. Missioni Quacchere nell'Italia del Seicento*, Roma Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1996. This tells the story of Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers and includes the Latin and Italian documents kept in the Inquisition Archives in Malta regarding the two women.
- 2) Article: Un Masaniello Quacchero: James Nayler in *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, Anno XXXIII (1997), n. 1, Firenze. This studies Italian reactions to Nayler's case.

Stefano Villani is currently working on an edition of *A True Account of the Great Tryals and Cruel Sufferings Undergone by those Two Faithful Servants of God Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers*, London 1663. This edition will be published in 1998.

Stefano Villani is a member of the Friends Historical Society.

*Howard F. Gregg*