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QUAKERS AND THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

The early history of the Quakers has been transformed during the past generation. The new discoveries started from non-Quakers – Alan Cole and Barry Reay; but they have now been accepted for publication by the *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*. Most of what I shall say derives from the work of Barry Reay. Early Quakers were not pacifists, nor did they abstain on principle from political activity. Fox and others advocated an international millenarian crusade. The Peace Principle was first published in January 1661. It took time and a good deal of organization before it was adopted by all who called themselves Friends: there were many splits in the process. The Society which emerged was very different from the Quakers of the 1650s – so much so that perhaps we need a different word for the period 1651 to 1661, with which I shall deal.

Our first problem is that of sources. Quakers re-wrote their own history. They edited earlier texts, including Fox's *Journal*. Many tracts of the 1650s either were not reprinted or were reprinted only in a modified form. There is nothing wrong with this, of course: Lodowick Muggleton drastically edited writings of the chief prophet, John Reeve, when he republished them after Reeve's death. When John Toland edited the republican Edmund Ludlow's *Memoirs* for publication in 1698 he omitted much of Ludlow's millenarianism so as to make his anti-

militarism more acceptable to late seventeenth-century Whig opinion. His object was to make Ludlow useful to the Good Old Cause in changed circumstances: Ludlow I am sure would have agreed. What was important for later Quakers was the message of salvation: bellicose millenarianism would have given the wrong impression after 1661. But the practice created problems for historians, who until very recently relied on later reprints of pamphlets of the 1650s.

Who were the first Quakers? It is not an easy question to answer with certainty. Early Quaker historians relied, necessarily, on George Fox's *Journal* for the early years of what became the Society of Friends. Naturally Fox's *Journal* is about the groups which owed their convincement to him. But Fox and other early leaders were bringing together pre-existent groups such as Fox found waiting for his message when he journeyed north in 1651 – Grindletonians, Seekers, Ranters, Muggletonians, what Fox called "shattered Baptists." There was in this decade very little Quaker organization, though possibly rather more than in other "sects" to which we give labels. The word "Quaker," like the words "Puritan," "Anabaptist," "Leveller," was a label applied by enemies, rather like "red" today: it has no more precise meaning than that. The Quakers originated in the North, and such organization as they had was for long centred on Swarthmoor Hall, where Margaret Fell lived. In 1652 the only groups regarding themselves as followers of Fox were in the northern and north-western counties. But then they undertook a campaign to the South, and by 1656 they are to be found over most of England. It was a rapid and most impressive spread – to enemies rather frightening.

Sectarian names are largely applied to historians after the event, names which would not have meant much to contemporaries. We still argue about whether Bunyan was a Baptist or a Congregationalist. We do not know what label, if any, to apply to Oliver Cromwell or John Milton – fairly documented characters. Sectarian labels are a product of the period after 1660, when persecuted communities had to organize and discipline themselves in order to survive, and when governments wanted them to be labelled in the interests of keeping them under control. But Quakers in fact even in the 1650s kept up by correspondence perhaps better organization than any other group which we later recognize as a sect.

Quakers are a product of the revolutionary decades of the forties and fifties, the greatest upheaval in English history. Before 1640 all Englishmen and women were deemed to belong to the national church, and had a legal obligation to attend worship in their parish church every

Sunday, to listen to a clergyman in whose selection they had had no say, and whose theology and/or personality they might detest. Before 1640 there was a strict censorship, which prevented the printing of "unorthodox" books. The bookseller George Thomason, a friend of Milton's, realizing that he was living in momentous times, started in 1640 to buy and keep a copy of every book or newspaper published, and he continued until 1660. In 1640 he bought 22 books; by 1642 the number was 1,966, and it continued to average over 1000 a year until 1660. In 1640 he bought no newspapers: they were illegal. By 1641 there were 4, by 1645 722. We can only guess at what this meant for a reading public which had clearly been starved of material under a censorship which prevented the publication of legal works by Sir Edward Coke, of works on the millennium by scholars like Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede. Thomas Hobbes chose not to publish at all before 1640, when he was 52 years old – the age at which Shakespeare died.

There was a similar liberation of religious discussion. Hitherto illegal groups were now free to meet where they could – in private houses, in ale-houses, in the open air – to discuss what they wanted to discuss, not what the university-educated parson of their parish decided they should listen to, without discussion. In an age with no daily press, no TV, no radio, the clergy were the opinion-formers. The government's object had been to have an approved interpreter of the Scriptures – the source of all wisdom and truth – in every parish in the country. But now men and women were free to form their own groups, under an elected chairman – so-called mechanic preachers – and to discuss what interested *them*, as *they* wished. Women took part in these discussions: some women preached, to the horror of traditionalists.

The parochial system was financed by tithes. Every man was supposed to pay 10 per cent of his income to the parson. Tithes fell especially heavily on the peasantry who had to pay in kind – one-tenth of their crops or animals. Radicals had long opposed tithes, and Quakers took over this opposition, though the campaign preceded them and was not limited to them. Milton thought that religious freedom was impossible without abolishing tithes. The Quaker Anthony Pearson said that tithes should have been cut off with the King's head. But abolishing tithes would have undermined the national church and substituted a voluntary system. Tithes were also a form of property: many gentlemen had inherited tithes which before the Reformation had gone to monasteries and since then had been collected by the lay successors to monastic property. In any case refusal of a long-established customary

payment like tithes would set a bad precedent: "no tithes, no rent" was a frequent cry of alarm from the gentry. Some churches actually closed down for lack of maintenance. This was a real problem for conservatives as they tried to consolidate their revolution in the fifties. Cromwell is alleged to have said that no temporal government could survive without a national church that adhered to it. But tithes were naturally unpopular.

Before 1640 it was assumed that politics were the exclusive concern of the upper classes. An Elizabethan Secretary of State declared that 'day labourers, poor husbandmen, yea merchants or retailers that have no free land, copyholders and all artificers ... have no voice or authority in our commonwealth, and no account is taken of them, but only to be ruled'. This applied in practice. When in 1628 Charles I ultimately and grudgingly accepted the Petition of Right, embodying the first concessions made by the monarchy to parliamentary claims, the Commons asked that it should be printed. Charles refused, furious at the idea of the vulgar seeing such a document and perhaps even discussing the extent of the royal prerogative. In 1641, a year before civil war, the House of Commons drafted the Grand Remonstrance, a catalogue of all the ways in which they thought the king's ministers had been at fault. A very critical document, it passed in the House by a narrow majority. It was then suggested that the Remonstrance should be printed. This caused outrage among the minority, that criticisms of the King should be exposed to the lower classes. Swords were actually drawn in the House – for I believe the only time in history, so far, so outrageous did the proposal seem.

Yet with the breakdown of censorship, with freedom of assembly and with no limits on what might be discussed, there were no longer any secrets of state. In the free-for-all discussion which followed, every subject under the sun was canvassed. Levellers called for a democratic republic, and proclaimed human equality, Diggers advocated a communist society, others equality of women and men, marriage and free love. The authority of the Bible and the existence of heaven and hell were questioned. Ranters asserted the eternity of matter (which at one time interested George Fox) – all these were freely discussed. Milton's *Areopagitica* proudly hailed this new world of liberty. Ministers and bishops were mocked. In London and especially in the Army there was a free-thinking milieu from which Levellers, Ranters, Muggletonians, Quakers and Bunyan emerged. Quakers were later said to have 'reclaimed such as neither magistrate nor minister ever speaks to' – which suggests that the first Quakers appealed to a lower social class than they did later.

After Parliament's victory in 1647 the radical New Model Army of the career open to the talents took over effective power. Two years later it purged Parliament and brought the King to trial as a traitor to the people of England. The House of Lords was abolished, the republic proclaimed. Bishops had been abolished in 1646. Anything might happen.

Many expected King Charles to be succeeded by King Jesus. Millenarian hopes were rife, founded on the best scholarly interpretations of the Biblical prophecies, which seemed to point to the 1650s as the period when the millennium was likely to begin. George Fox thought he was living in "the last times;" "the mighty day of the Lord is coming" when the saints will reign – "of whom I am one," Fox added. Such remarks were not reprinted in later collected editions of Fox's works.

Among the few specific things Fox tells us about his early preaching – which in the *Journal* sounds orthodox enough – is that he had 'great opening concerning the things written in the Revelation,' which was for him the most relevant book in the Bible. It may well be that millenarianism played a far greater part in his preaching and in the interests of his audiences than he was later to record. After the Restoration the millenarian moment had passed, and Quakers played it down; but that was not true of the fifties. The only movement which enjoyed a comparable popular success was that of the Fifth Monarchists, also millenarians. Gerrard Winstanley, who founded a communist colony in Surrey three months after the execution of the King, held that the Second Coming meant the rising of Christ in all "sons and daughters." He believed that Christ was reason, and that his rising would lead all to see the rationality of co-operation rather than competition, and would lead to the peaceful establishment of a communist society. And, he said, he expected to see no other Second Coming. Many were later to attribute the origins of the Quakers to Winstanley – wrongly, I think.

The free-for-all of the forties released long-held but suppressed radical traditions which Quakers inherited – refusal of hat honour, use of "thou" to social superiors, demands for law reform, for better treatment of the poor, for "handfast" marriages rather than a church ceremony. Burrough at least among the early Quaker leaders was aware of the heretical tradition which the Quakers inherited.

In the civil war most of those who were later to become Quakers had been staunch Parliamentarians, 'they stood by [Parliament] in time of greatest dangers in all the late wars' said Howgill. Many Quakers had been in the Army, 'many precious men ventured their lives and lost their

blood' to win liberty 'as men and Christians.' James Nayler agreed; Quakers 'generally did venture their lives and estates with those that are in present government [1658], purchasing their freedom as men with great loss.' The Army, Margaret Fell said, had been 'a battle axe in the hand of the Lord.' George Bishop told Oliver Cromwell in 1656 that the original Parliamentary Cause was 'the highest on which men were ever engaged in the field.' Bishop rebuked Cromwell for betraying this cause.

Quakers did not resign from the Army on pacifist grounds when they were convinced: they were expelled for refusing oaths, Fox and Burrough complained. Henry Cromwell thought 'their principles and practices ... not very consistent with civil government, much less with the discipline of an army.' But Byllynge claimed to be 'an owner of the sword in its place.' Fox thought that one Quaker soldier was worth seven non-Quakers. Far from disapproving of military service he wrote a tract for members of the Army, urging them to 'see that you know a soldier's place ... and that ye be soldiers qualified.' The New Model Army was a uniquely democratic force, which for a time played a very radical role. Without it there would have been no religious toleration, no abolition of monarchy or House of Lords, no protection for Quakers against J.Ps. – and no conquest of Ireland, of which Quakers showed no disapproval. But the Levellers failed to win control of the Army in 1647-9; the Fifth Monarchists in 1653-5. Quakers went on hoping that the Army might resume its radical role right down to 1660.

Fox often urged Oliver Cromwell and the Army to undertake a crusade against popery in Europe. In January 1658 he told the Protector that if he had 'minded the work of the Lord as he began with thee at first ... the King of France should have bowed his neck under thee.' 'Let thy soldiers go forth ... that thou may rock nations as a cradle.' Later, addressing "inferior officers and soldiers" as against the generals, Fox said 'never set up your standard till you come to Rome.'

Quakers frequently used disturbing military metaphors. 'Gird on your sword,' Burrough urged 'the Camp of the Lord in England' 'and prepare yourselves for battle.' 'Let not your eye pity nor your hand spare, but wound the lofty and tread underfoot the honourable of the earth.' Howgill cried 'spare none, neither old or young; kill, cut off, destroy, bathe your sword in the blood of Amalek.' Audland repeated the message: 'the sword of the Lord is in the hands of the saints, and this sword divides, hews and cuts down deceit.' Burrough, envisaging the imminent Second Coming, insisted 'all that would not that Christ should reign, slay them before him.' And Fox warned 'a day of slaughter is coming to you that have made war against the Lamb and against the

saints. The sword you cannot escape, and it shall be upon you before long.'

How seriously are we to take this alarming language? When Margaret Fell asked in 1656 'How is our war prospering in England?', she presumably referred to the successful propaganda campaign which Quakers had undertaken. But were the reiterated public threats of Quaker leaders all metaphorical? Conservatives may perhaps be forgiven for not being quite sure: they did not know, as we know, that the Quakers were to proclaim pacifism as a principle after 1661. In the 1650s they knew only that Quakers were a radical group, reproducing many of the ideas of Levellers, Diggers and Ranters, all of whom had been suppressed between 1649 and 1651, immediately before the appearance of Quakers on the national scene. In the mid-fifties Quakers were recruiting rapidly. Alarm was not entirely unreasonable. Quakers were "turners of the world upside down" – to cite words used by William Penn in his Introduction to Fox's *Journal* in 1694.

Some Quakers defended regicide. George Bishop expressed approval of the Army's purge of Parliament in December 1648, and thought that Charles's execution had been 'for the preservation of the public interest.' It was God, Burrough believed, who 'overthrew that oppressing power of kings, lords ... and bishops, and brought some tyrants and oppressors to just execution.' "Some tyrants" could hardly have excluded Charles I, Stratford and Laud. Bishop defended Cromwell's brutual conquest of Ireland: no Quaker seems to have opposed it on principle. The Irish were antichristians.

Quakers, as Levellers had done, cried out against the oppression of the poor. A rich man, Fox said, is 'the greatest thief,' since he got 'his goods by cozening and cheating, by lying and defrauding' – another tract not reprinted in Fox's *Works.* Here was strong Biblical language again. 'Weep and howl, for your misery is coming,' Nayler told 'great men and rich men.' Fox strongly supported law reform, and opposed hanging for theft. 'Throw away all law books,' he recommended; law should be made known to the people. 'Away with lawyers' – recalling Winstanley this time. 'If a lord or an earl come into your courts,' Fox said, 'you will hardly fine him for not putting off his hat ... It is the poor that suffer, and the rich bears with the rich.' With reference to the Quaker refusal of oaths he added 'Some you have made to swear, some you have made a pay for swearing' (Neither of these tracts was reprinted in his works). Quakers came to believe that the Cause had been betrayed.

Slow disillusionment set in as Cromwell tried to come to terms with the "natural rulers," as generals got rich and the Army was deliberately

depoliticized. It came to exist only to collect the taxes to pay for the Army to collect the taxes ... Burrough warned Cromwell that he and his government had neglected 'to take off oppression, and to ease the oppressed,' ignoring 'the grievious cry of the poor.' Like Winstanley, he insisted that 'the same laws stand still in force by which tyranny and oppression is acted.' 'You have promised many fair promises to the nation,' said Fox, 'but little have you performed.'

In May 1659 the Army restored the Rump of the Long Parliament to power, and with it hope for the radicals. Fox announced euphorically that 'the Lord Jesus Christ is come to reign. ... Now shall the Lamb and the saints have victory'. 'The way of the coming of his kingdom hath seemed to be prepared,' Burrough told M.Ps., by the "mightly things" done in England. But this hope depended on the survival of the republic. Fox laid a programme of reform before Parliament – toleration, abolition of tithes, law reform, a large programme of expropriation – of church, crown and royalists' lands, and of monastic lands which had been in the possession of gentry families for over a century. The proceeds would go to pay for the Army and to the poor, who should also have all manorial fines and profits, 'for lords have enough.' This was a larger programme of expropriation than ever the communist Winstanley envisaged. Howgill in 1660 pointed out that confiscated estates would maintain 'an army in the nation for many years' – a double cause of alarm to landed gentry.

Burrough asked Parliament 'to establish the [Leveller] Agreement of the People'. He emphasized Englishmen's birthright freedom in Leveller language, describing himself as 'a friend to England's Commonwealth,' as 'a freeborn Englishman.' 'We look for a new earth as well as a new heaven' he announced ominously. But the hope was short-lived. As the threat of a restoration of monarchy loomed, Quakers (and other radicals) became more desperate. 'Is there no hope of your return to the Good Old Cause?' Burrough asked the Army – four months before Charles II returned to the throne. 'Whoever are against the Good Old Cause and perfect freedom,' he declared, 'we are against them and will engage our lives against them.'

Quakers were opposed on principle to the restoration of monarchy. 'Those who desired an earthly king,' said Fox, were 'traitors against Christ.' 'Talk of [restoring] the House of Lords' was 'a dirty, nasty thing.' Burrough assured the Army that 'we will engage our very lives against the enemies of the Good Old Cause.' A royalist feared that 'the whole Army should be reduced to follow the Quakers.' The consequence was panic fear of Quakers, which Barry Reay, the best-informed historian on this subject, thinks contributed significantly to

the speed with which Charles II was – to his own surprise – recalled to the throne.

The fear was to be well-founded. Quakers' numbers were uncertain, but they had rapidly increased in the decade of their existence. They repeated many Leveller, Digger and Ranter claims. They rejected oaths, believed to be the cement of society, and tithes, the foundation of a national church. They taught that the Bible was so internally contradictory and inconsistent that it could not be the Word of God. The Quaker Samuel Fisher argued this case in a weighty scholarly tome published in 1660. It influenced Spinoza, and through him enlightened European opinion generally. For the Baptist Thomas Collier Quaker doctrine meant 'No Christ but within, no Scripture to be a rule, no ordinances, no law but their lusts, no heaven nor glory but here, no sin but men fancied to be so.' Fox claimed to be freed from sin on earth; renewed 'to the state of Adam ... before he fell.' Burrough taught that the saints 'may be perfectly freed from sin in this life so as no more to commit it.' Fox and many others denounced preachers who 'roar up for sin in their pulpits.' 'We have given our money and spent our labours in following them,' Fox exploded, 'and now they have gotten our money, they hope we will not look for perfection ... on this side of the grave, for we must carry a body of sin about us ... Oh deceivers!' Not to believe in the existence of sin had disturbing social implications.

As far as the Quakers were concerned, by 1659-60 the Army offered the only hope for reform – if it could be radicalized again. Bishop, Burrough, Howgill, Isaac Penington, all defended the Army's intervention in politics in 1659. Burrough acted as political leader of the Quakers in this period: Fox withdrew into the background. Burrough, Byllynge and other Quaker leaders negotiated seriously with the republican government for co-operation to prevent a restoration of monarchy, and for social reforms. In 1659-60 Quakers were rejoining the Army, and there was much talk of "arming the Quakers." Quakers acted as commissioners of the militia, as J.Ps. They were the last defenders of military dictatorship in England. But the defeat of the radicals, when it came, was so overwhelmingly decisive that it had to be accepted as the work of divine providence. How were Quakers to react to the collapse of their political hopes?

Here I want to speculate briefly, asking questions which go beyond the evidence. Had the Quakers a political programme? In the light of what we know of post-restoration Quakers it seems a silly question: in the light of what we now know of Quakerism in the 1650s it forces itself upon us. Quakers expected the rule of the saints (of whom Fox was one), and expected that rule to bring about a better society. I have cited the

programme which Fox put before the restored Rump in 1659; it would necessitate legislation. But had Quakers an *agreed* political programme?

The Nayler case in 1656-7 must have caused serious re-thinking among Quakers. Nayler's entry into Bristol, re-enacting Christ's entry into Jerusalem, led to what must have been a totally unexpected political storm. Parliament spent months fiercely debating whether or not Nayler should be condemned to death. Conservatives seized on Nayler's alleged blasphemy to call for stricter laws preventing free discussion, controlling itinerant ministers appealing to the lower order. Nayler's main defenders were Army officers. Cromwell used the occasion to negotiate a new, more conservative constitution, which would both limit toleration and get rid of Army rule and replace it by the rule of traditional law.

How did the Quakers re-act? Their tactics of demonstration and confrontation had been useful advertisements in local politics, winning support for Quakers who were roughly handled by magistrates. But the Nayler case had brought the whole power of the state to bear against Quakers, something beyond their ability to resist. They virtually disavowed Nayler. The attempted alliance with Army and republican governments in 1659-60 against a restoration of monarchy seems to have been a last desperate attempt at winning some share in policy making. When that failed there had to be a total rethink.

From about August 1659 to the beginning of 1660 George Fox withdrew from all activity, and seems to have undergone some sort of a spiritual crisis, if not a nervous breakdown. He took no part in the negotiations with republican politicians and Army leaders which Burrough and others undertook at this time, and seems to have been increasingly sceptical of them. He was unenthusiastic about Quakers taking up arms, but did not come out against it, even when asked. When he emerged from his "time of darkness", by which time the restoration was clearly looming, he seems to have decided that political action must be renounced. 'Nothing but hypocrisy and falsehood and fair pretences were seen among you', he told 'those that have been formerly in authority'. 'When you pretended to set up the Old Cause, it was but your silliness; so that you long stunk to sober people.' Fox must have realized during his period of abdication that the restoration of monarchy was inevitable, and that the millennium was not coming just yet. Perhaps indeed his withdrawal had been due to his recognition of the "silliness" and irrelevance of the frenzied activities of the republicans, and to his inability to prevent Quaker participation in them. So Charles II came back in May 1660.

Eight months later, in January 1661, there was a violent revolt by Fifth Monarchists which for a short time terrorized London. Many Quakers were arrested on suspicion of connection with this revolt. Twelve days later the "peace principle", henceforth characteristic of Quakerism, was declared. 'The spirit of Christ,' Fox declared, 'will never move us to fight a war against any man with carnal weapons.' This was a new principle. There had been Quaker pacifists in the fifties, including John Lilburne and the sailor Thomas Lurting. But there was no official endorsement of pacifism. As late as December 1659 Hubberthorne had publicly rebuked Baptists for declaring that they would be obedient in civil matters to any government established in England. Hubberthorne thought that this sold the pass to Charles Stuart. If he should 'come ... and establish popery and govern by tyranny,' he told the Baptists, 'you have begged pardon by promising willingly to submit ... Some did judge ye had been of another spirit.' But as the cause of the republic crumbled, Fox's new-found pacifism won rapid acceptance. Burrough came to see the restoration as a judgement of God upon England for the betrayal of the 1650s. 'They once had a good cause,' he told Charles II, 'and the Lord blessed them in it.' This was intended as a warning to the restored monarch. But within a week of the King's arrival in London Margaret Fell had drafted a declaration renouncing "carnal weapons," which was signed by Fox, Richard Hubberthorne, Samuel Fisher and four others. The Peace Principle seven months later was also signed by Fox, Hubberthorne and ten others. The restoration came because the Parliamentarian radicals were hopelessly divided. Quakers themselves were not united. Support for the peace principle was by no means unanimous. Some thought that the new discipline which accompanied it amounted to apostasy – a breach with the absolute individualism of the inner light in all believers.

1660 was a defeat for all radical social policies. It marked the end of millenarian hopes. The peace principle recognized these unpleasant facts, and differentiated Quakers from irreconcilable Fifth Monarchist insurrectionists who advocated inaugurating Christ's kingdom by immediate military violence.

So acceptance of the peace principle marked the end of an epoch – recognition that Christ's kingdom was not of this world, at least not yet. Abandonment of the rule of the saints, possibly through the Army, ended the perceived Quaker political threat, though it took some time for non-saints to appreciate this. It marked the end of the doctrine of perfectibility on earth as a political principle. It was a great turning point, shared by most other dissenters – as they now reluctantly became.

Early Quakers had attacked the very idea of a state church: some disliked any form of organization. They insisted that they were not a sect, not a church. But after 1660 some form of discipline ("good order") became increasingly necessary, if only to withstand persecution, to agree on appropriate forms of presentation of their message, to define who was and who was not a Quaker. The sense of the meeting was the compromise which gave a minimum or organization: but above it a traditional hierarchical structure had to be erected – quarterly meetings, national meetings.

Financial questions were involved. Who paid for itinerant ministers? Fox had money in his pocket when he started on his mission, but he was dependent on sympathizers for hospitality *en route.* There were dangers here, as for more conventional sects – of becoming dependent on the rich and respectable, and so giving them privileged treatment. Some have seen a take-over of Quakerism by the well-to-do Margaret Fell and William Penn, the friend of James II, and Margaret Fell's husband from 1669, George Fox. The first suggestion of a peace principle in 1660 seems to have come from Margaret Fell. There was of course no conspiracy here: any leader would have had to take similar action if the Society of Friends was to survive. Ranters who remained disorganized disappeared; Muggletonians who were almost equally without organization were subjected to the discipline imposed by the infallible Lodowick Muggleton, and anyway were not interested in proselytization.

The peace principle distinguished Quakers from the irreconcilable Fifth Monarchists who had risen in hopeless revolt in January 1661. The Quaker leadership tried hard to live down their image as "fanatics." They ceased to perform miracles: George Fox's *Book of Miracles* was not published. Public gestures like "going naked for a sign" were discouraged. Itinerant ministers were restricted, not least by the Act of Settlement of 1662. (This had been a wonderful liberation, especially for women Quakers, wandering unchaperoned all over Great Britain, rebuking Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates, journeying to the Pope, the Great Turk and to New England – least tolerant of all).

Some Quakers thought the peace principle and accompanying discipline amounted to apostasy, betraying the absolute individualism of the inner light. Many were the splits – Perrot, whom Fox admonished for wearing a sword, and who rather endearingly objected to holding meetings at stated times and places. (Dewsbery in 1659 had pleaded with Friends 'to meet as near as may be at the time appointed'). The Story-Wilkinson separation was more specifically on issues of discipline. Many Quakers continued to plot against the government. 400 pairs of

pistols were said to have been imported for "the Quakers" in August 1661. In 1663 many Friends had a "deep hand" in the Northern Plot; 1,000 were expected to rise, and many did. As late as 1685 at least a dozen Quakers joined in Monmouth's rebellion, of whom three were executed. A Quaker commissioned by Monmouth to recruit Clubmen enlisted some 160 by appeals to the danger of popery. Quakers held state office in the New England colonies, and lobbied in Parliamentary elections in England in 1678-80, when the radical cause seemed to be reviving. Penn was election agent for the republican Algernon Sidney.

This brings me to a question on which I hardly dare to touch: how far was Fox the undisputed leader of the Quakers before 1661? Was there such a leader? Nayler was described as "the head Quaker" in Parliament in 1656-7, and the savagery of his punishment suggests that he was seen as a symbolic target. Nayler was eight years older than Fox. He wrote the first Quaker book, in 1653; between 1655 and 1656 he published no less than 13 pamphlets answering attacks on Quakers. Edward Burrough – a much younger man – seems to have been the political spokesman for Quakers from the mid-fifties; he took the lead in negotiations with the Commonwealth government in 1659-60, when Fox withdrew from activity. Margaret Fell at Swarthmoor seems to have been in charge of correspondence and had much organizational responsibility. I imagine that such leadership as there was before 1660 must have been collective rather than individual. Fox's mysterious withdrawal after August 1659 may have been the result of the defeat of his preferred policies, which were finally vindicated in the acceptance of the peace principle.

Were there divisions? Francis Howgill continued to use bellicose language after January 1661. 'The godly,' Howgill still proclaimed, would 'trample down the powers of darkness and the seat of violence, for ever.' Ames, also after the peace principle, said 'the battle is the Lord's and strength and power is from the Lord manifest in you ... The might of the noble of the earth shall vanish as the smoke, and the strength of kings shall be as stubble before the fire; not by the arm of flesh or carnal weapons to destroy the creatures, but by the spirit of the living God.' Who exactly of the leadership supported the original peace principle in 1661? Did Howgill? Did Ames? But all this is mere speculation.

Fox's takeover of leadership was facilitated by the premature deaths of most of the other leading figures. Parnell had died in 1656 at the age of 19, Camm and Lilburne in 1657, Nayler in 1660. George Fox the Younger followed in 1661, Burrough, Hubberthorne and Ames in 1662, Audland in 1664, Fisher in 1665, Farnsworth in 1666, Howgill in 1669.

It is a remarkable tribute to the killing-power of seventeenth-century gaols, a long sentence in which only the toughest, morally and physically, could survive – as Fox did, as Bunyan did. There were resignations – Perrot, Pearson, Bishop, Byllynge – and emigration. Whitehead and Dewsbury were virtually the only surviving leaders from the fifties. The way was clear for Margaret and George Fox who were married in 1669 to take over and for Robert Barclay to rewrite Quaker theology in his *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* of 1676. It was published in the same year as his *Anarchy of the Ranters*, disavowing unseemly "enthusiasm."

Another consequence of the Peace Principle and the discipline necessary to enforce it was that the Society of Friends became *in fact* a sect like other sects – something which had seemed impossible for earlier Quakers expecting the rule of the saints. 'The laws of man can but settle a sect,' Edward Burrough had said; 'true religion can never be settled by that measure' (*Works*, pp. 509-13), but true religion in Burrough's sense has not yet been settled in England.

After 1661 the publications of Quakers were subjected to *de facto* censorship – first informally by Fox, after 1672 more formally. In consequence the writings of Nayler disappear from sight, and his name is rarely mentioned. Even in 1716 his *Collection of Sundry Books* was published only after much debate and with many misgivings; and many of his writings were omitted. Writings by Burrough, Howgill and George Fox the Younger were reprinted, but again with significant omissions, notably of Burrough's writings around 1660. Isaac Penington's works from his pre-Quaker period were not reprinted, and there were omissions from those of his political tracts of 1660 which were reprinted. George Fox, in editing his *Journal* for publication from the so-called *Short Journal* (1663-4), omitted many passages referring to his millenarian expectations, to his Cromwellian sympathies, his claims to be the Son of God or Moses, to his miracles, to the fact that he lent a meeting-house to soldiers. Thomas Ellwood further edited it for publication in 1694 so that 'nothing may be omitted fit to be inserted, nor anything inserted fit to be left out'. What was fit in 1694 was very different from the revolutionary fifties.

So the world was left with the eighteenth-century image of pacifist Quakers using quaint, old-fashioned speech-forms like "thou" and "thee," refusing to swear or to remove their hats in court in a quaint, old-fashioned way. This image was easily read back into the seventeenth century, not without some help from the Quakers. So it was surprising to re-discover what Quakers had been like in the 1650s.

But that must not be the last word. Quakers have given the world more than any other seventeenth-century group. And the essential Quaker message was not lost. Margaret Fell recalled Fox saying, on the second day of her acquaintance: 'You will say that Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst *thou* say?' 'I saw clearly we were all wrong,' Margaret Fell commented; he 'opened us a book that we had never read in, nor indeed had never heard it was our duty to read in it, to wit the light of Christ in our consciences' – the consciences of ordinary men and women.

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The above is the text, slightly amended, of a lecture delivered at Friends House London on 1st March 1991. Ed.