

George Fox's "Book of Miracles"

Reviewed by DR. HOWARD E. COLLIER

George Fox's "Book of miracles." Edited with an introduction and notes by Henry J. Cadbury, Ph.D. With a foreword by Rufus M. Jones. Cambridge, University Press, 1948. Pp. xvi, 162 ; 9 plates. 21s.

NOTHING distinguishes the typical attitude of the seventeenth from the attitude of the twentieth century more clearly than their conception of the miraculous. In the seventeenth century a miracle was a non-natural, a praeternatural, even a contra-natural event. If we use the word miracle to-day we mean an unexpected and unaccountable happening. In the seventeenth century (and later) there were believed to be two sources of miracle, God and the Devil. Reading Henry Cadbury's book we realize first that events similar to the "miracles" that marked the early days of Quakerism are happening to-day ; and second that the problems posed by "miracles" to the minds of early Friends, are posed to us by our experiences.

The value of this book is out of all proportion to its size. The author has not wasted a word. If we say that the Introductory Essay, supported by a Foreword by the late Rufus Jones, is more valuable than the historical material on which the book is based, we mean to emphasize the value of the introduction and not to disparage the importance of the research on which the book is founded. To Quaker historians this judgment will be unacceptable. The book is a notable piece of Quaker scholarship.

During the course of his researches, Henry Cadbury discovered in the Library at Friends House the "index" of a lost *Book of Miracles*. It was found amongst the entries of a comprehensive index-catalogue of all Fox's papers, made about 1695, and known as the *Annual Catalogue of George Fox's papers*. The original book contained a record of 150 miracles, providences and judgments recorded by Fox during the active years of his service. This book was known

to Ellwood when he published Fox's *Journal*, but was suppressed—or never published.

Patient study, reinforced by a knowledge of contemporary literature, has enabled Henry Cadbury, not only to reconstruct some of the contents of the lost *Book*, but also to set it in its perspective against the background of the age in which the *Book* was written. Henry Cadbury shows that during the first fifty years of the existence of the Society of Friends there was a widespread interest in, what may be called, the non-physical means of healing. Fox was a notable exponent of this kind of healing. Sometimes he made use of physical means of healing also. Sometimes he co-operated with doctors, sometimes he "declined to meddle" with medicines and with doctors. By his contemporaries Fox was held to be a miracle worker. The original Society was composed in part of people who brought with them, not only an expectation that miracles would occur, but also the characteristic "Seeker" belief that miracles were "necessary to faith" and the only proof of religious authority. Many of their contemporaries classed Quakers with wizards and witches and believed that Friends, in common with the Papists, possessed and exercised evil, supernatural powers. Many events happened within the Society, on its borders and amongst allied Christian groups (especially the Baptists), which were regarded as miracles. Failures to heal and failures to perform miracles also occurred in the Society. Some of these were recorded in Quaker literature, and some are preserved only in other, and hostile, contemporary sources. People who had been healed either relapsed into illness or died a natural death; others "outran their Guide" and became apostates. Some prophecies were not fulfilled: Providence did not always intervene to save. Still others were healed as to the spirit, but were not healed in the body. Some were healed in body, but did not return to give thanks or did not manifest the fruits of the spirit.

Successful miracles served to enhance the repute of the Society: failures nearly destroyed it, on several occasions.

Against this background the decision to suppress the *Book of Miracles* can be understood. Caution was clearly necessary by 1690, to avoid extravagant claims, "enthusiasms" of a wildly unreal kind and to avoid the undue

exaltation of the importance of any person (even of George Fox).

At this point these notes pass from a consideration of the contents of the book under review and become a reflection upon some of the lessons that Henry Cadbury's book may have to teach us to-day.

The decision to suppress the *Book* does not imply that Friends doubted the "factual accuracy" of the events recorded in it. Even if they did so, there is plenty of evidence in the writings of early eighteenth century Quakers to show that members of the Society believed in the efficacy of prayer and in personal and corporate guidance—all of which would have qualified for description as "miracles" in those days.

Three related questions have been raised in the mind of the writer of this article by Henry Cadbury's book. Did early Friends throw away wheat with the chaff when they suppressed the *Book*? Was it possible to separate wheat from chaff at that period? Can we do so now? We shall consider the last of these questions.

In the modern world, by non-physical means of healing, we do not mean the same as "miracle" meant during the seventeenth century. By non-physical means of healing we understand first, psycho-therapy (which includes suggestion, persuasion, re-education, group healing, occupational therapy, the use of music and the arts, etc.); second, we mean "spirit-healing" (often called spiritualism) in its many forms, including prestige-healing or faith-healing, and suggestion; and third, we mean divine, spiritual or religious healing, which includes prayer, worship and all of the "means of grace" as well as certain special techniques with which we are not concerned here.

Nowadays, we do not make an arbitrary distinction between natural and supernatural; we make a distinction of quality rather than of kind, between the natural and the divine. Most modern people will be ready to admit that "states of soul" affect "states of the brain." Most will agree also that "spirit" is in some sense a "power" that affects life and health. Hence most modern people would not reject the fundamental hypothesis upon which George Fox's practice was founded. Many modern people—some of whom are reasonably trustworthy observers—are

convinced that the non-physical means of healing produce "cures" that are strictly analogous both to the miracles and the failures recorded in Fox's *Book*.

With these thoughts in mind, what action should we take to-day, if we were placed in Ellwood's editorial chair? We should publish our *Book of Miracles*, but should hope that Friends would appoint a committee to write an introduction to it. In that introduction a few points would be emphasized.

1. We should make a provisional distinction between spiritual or religious healing (also called divine healing) on the one hand, and secular or this-worldly healing on the other. The end and purpose of religious healing is a change of heart, a growth of character, the production of the fruits of the spirit. The end of secular healing is the cure of disease. Fitness of mind and body is the secular objective in healing.
2. We should affirm that all healing is good and valuable and according to the will of God, by whatever means it may be accomplished.
3. Nevertheless we should affirm that secular health and healing are only relatively good. The absolute good is entry into the Kingdom. People should seek the Kingdom first and seek it moreover regardless of whether secular healing is subsequently "added" unto them. In our view (as in George Fox's) the Christian miracle may occur in such a form that the world cannot recognize it.
4. We should acknowledge and record apparent failures as well as successes, since much may be learned from failure. We are not prepared (at the present time at least) to acknowledge that failure or success on the secular, this-worldly level of experience, necessarily establishes or refutes spiritual or religious truths.
5. Nevertheless since we believe in the essential unity of the secular and the religious, we shall expect to find a positive correlation to exist between religion and secular health.
6. We are distrustful, however, of any means or method of non-physical secular healing that stresses the importance of this-worldly healing as a proof, either of the validity of the religious theory supposed to underlie that method, or as the final objective of healing. To distract the mind of the sick from the Kingdom of God is not what we understand by religious healing. To fix the attention of the sick on his body, his mind, or his own desires is not the way to promote health. To fix his attention upon hypothetical discarnate intelligences may harm his spiritual development and shut him off from the "First Search."
7. While suggesting those cautions, we acknowledge that the religious and spiritual life has much to contribute to positive health. We give thanks for every healing, no matter by whom it may be performed or by what method it may be accomplished. The healing of the sick by religious or spiritual means is now and has always been

one of the chief gateways to the Kingdom. The discipline of sickness has been and is one of the chief means of grace.

In conclusion, the writer must apologize to our Friend for having used this book as a peg to hang his hat upon ! The book, its style, its illustrations and its contents reflect credit on all concerned. We are sure Friends will read it, with the attention it deserves.

Quakerism in Friedrichstadt

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WE regret that in editing this for the press an error was introduced, for which our contributor is not responsible, and we offer apology.

In the first paragraph, for 1696 read 1677. Amsterdam Yearly Meeting was established during the visit of Fox, Penn and Barclay in that year. (G. Fox, *Journal*. Bicent. ed., II, 260 ; *Short journal*, 238.)

The footnote on p. 50 mentioning the visit of William Ames to Friedrichstadt in 1657 or '58 should have been attached to the date 1663 on p. 49. It makes clear that the Friedrichstadt record omits the earliest Quaker visit of all, which was some years before there were any Friends in the town.

EDITOR