

Isabel Grubb (1881-1972)

THERE has been no Irish Quaker historian of the calibre of Isabel Grubb since the time of John Ruddy (1697-1774). Her grasp of the essentials of Quakerism enabled her to place it in the varying Irish scene with its historical background, and her works are consulted by scholars of many countries in their search for a knowledge of Irish Friends. Isabel was humble in appraisal of her own gifts which, nevertheless, she was very ready to share with others. Asked to write one of a series of small pamphlets edited by Stanley McC. Halliday on the Quaker message she, characteristically, chose to collect some sayings of eminent Friends and quote entirely from them as her contribution. Among her papers sent up to Eustace Street Historical Library after her death are folders of letters from all over the world asking for her advice and guidance for work being undertaken. All are answered and filed. For the careless or ignorant she had scant respect, though entering with candour and appreciation into the queries of an enquiring mind. Her thesis (1916) on Irish Quakerism gained her an M.A. degree from London University. Later she studied at Woodbrooke, of which she became a Fellow in 1926.

The title of Isabel's thesis (which was not published) is "Social conditions in Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as illustrated by early Quaker records". After a preliminary introduction including an informative bibliography and description of the Irish background the work is divided into seven chapters illustrative of Quaker life in Ireland, the last one being on Relations with the Government. This is probably the most comprehensive study ever made of Friends in the Irish contemporary scene and it is a pity that it was never published.

Before giving her whole attention to writing and Quaker work Isabel had taught at Mountmellick School (where she had been a pupil) and at one or two English schools, including Sidcot School (1920-24). There are still Mountmellick old scholars who speak of her with affection and great respect. William Glynn tells us in his appreciation in *The Friend*

(February 1972) of her lifelong interest in botany, archaeology and local history, nurtured by her father, J. Ernest Grubb (1843-1927). From her father Isabel absorbed stories of the great famine in Ireland which, although only a small child at the time he remembered perfectly, his parents, John and Rebecca (Strangman) Grubb having played an active part in relief work in Carrick-on-Suir where they lived. Through her biography of her father (*J. Ernest Grubb of Carrick-on-Suir*, Talbot Press, 1928) one is made aware, not only of the great bond of affection and shared interests which existed between the two of them, but also of the deep spiritual influence which he bequeathed to his daughter.

A year prior to this publication her *Quakers in Ireland, 1654-1900* (Swarthmore Press, London, 1927) was published. We learn from the Introduction that "the Quaker community had a definite place in the national life as traders and farmers". Following this there are chapters on Pioneers, a Quaker merchant, Friends in War-Time, Daily Life, Education, Philanthropy, Light and Shade—all outlined with clarity and brevity in a book which is widely read by scholar and layman alike. *Quakerism and industry* (published by Williams and Norgate in 1930) has not such a wide appeal though still asked for as an authoritative reference book. *Quaker homespuns* (1932, H. R. Allenson Ltd.) is justly beloved by all, adult or child. It treats of well-known Quaker incidents, wrapped in a semi-fictional guise which has a definite appeal especially to the young. Probably the work best known to historians is her edition of William Penn's *My Irish Journal* in 1952. This was done at the suggestion of Henry J. Cadbury, its outstanding value lying in its masterly elucidation of names and places which otherwise are obscure in the Journal. Only one equipped with Isabel's knowledge of Irish personalities and topography could have produced this. Among her shorter works "Quakerism and home life", contributed to *Children of light* (1938), is a study based on incidents and difficulties of everyday life as reacted to by ordinary Friends' families in the eighteenth century. In 1929 *Friends' quarterly examiner* published an article by Isabel Grubb based on the address she had given to Dublin Yearly Meeting in May of the same year. It is entitled "Quaker Ministry in Ireland". One paragraph from this illuminates for us the rare devotion of Isabel's mind. "It is not my

intention however", she says, "to speak of the ministry which works directly for the betterment of social conditions. Irish Friends have had their share in it in the past and continue to find fresh openings for it in our country to-day; but in passing from the subject I must add that I believe a real danger exists in the inclination of some to look on social service as a substitute for divine service—for worship. Love to man cannot take the place of offering ourselves to God in worship, nor of the spiritual energy for service which comes to those who seek to know His will for them by communion with Him". Again, "I seem to distinguish three elements in the Meeting for Worship: the physical presence, the mental equipment, and the spiritual experience. The third of these is, of course, the most important but one about which it is difficult to say anything. Our spiritual experience can be trained in every incident in our lives. One or two souls of outstanding religious experience make a great difference to a meeting. We all may pray for power to make our lives as rich as theirs".

She practised as she preached, and looked upon her duties to the Society as an integral part of her religion. She was assistant clerk to Dublin Yearly Meeting from 1931 to 1937, in which year she became the Recording Clerk for the Friends' World Conference. In addition, she was the first Irish Friend to become a member of the World Committee for Consultation. Through all her middle years she travelled widely in international work for Friends. Her last long journey at the age of 74 was to Australia to see some of her family and to visit many small meetings in that continent. One of her greatest interests lay in the Historical Library of the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland. For very many years she gave it devoted care as curator and as clerk of its Committee, only resigning in 1955 on finding the journey from Waterford too great to attend regularly. She remained a committee member to the end of her life.

Much of the cataloguing in the library was done by her and the accession book bears witness to the large number of books, pamphlets, curios, etc., either presented by her or by her instrumentality. Some years ago she gave the library her large collection of manuscripts which up to then had been housed in her own home. This is fully catalogued as a separate collection. Seven boxes contain the correspondence

of the Shackleton family of Ballitore and two of Mary (Shackleton) Leadbeater's correspondence. These are known as the Fennell collection having been collected by a Fennell descendent of the Shackletons. The remainder should properly be called the Seskin collection, having been indexed by Isabel under the prefix "S" for Seskin the name of her home above Carrick-on-Suir; but together they are usually known as the Grubb Collection.

Isabel's wisdom, advice and vigorous personality are missed by young and old alike. Her witness remains in the results of such a life.

OLIVE C. GOODBODY

LIST OF BOOKS, ARTICLES, COMMUNICATIONS, &c.
BY ISABEL GRUBB

Books:

Quakers in Ireland, 1654-1900. London: Swarthmore Press, 1927.
158 pp.

J. Ernest Grubb of Carrick-on-Suir. Dublin & Cork: Talbot Press,
1928. 94 pp.

Quakerism and industry before 1800. London: Williams &
Norgate, 1930. 192 pp.

Quaker homespuns, 1655-1833. London: H. R. Allenson, [1932].
144 pp.

Some practical thoughts on worshipping together. London:
Friends Book Centre, for Friends Literature Committee, 1934.
4 pp.

My Irish journal, 1669-1670; by William Penn. Edited by Isabel
Grubb. With an introduction by Henry J. Cadbury. London
[etc.]: Longmans, Green, 1952. [vi], 103 pp.

Contribution to CHILDREN OF LIGHT: in honor of Rufus M.
Jones. Edited by Howard H. Brinton. New York,
Macmillan, 1938.

"Quakerism and home life: an eighteenth century study."
pp. 279-303.

Contribution to the AMERICAN FRIEND:

"Gradual development of Irish Quakerism." vol. 34 (O.S.),
no. 40, 1927, pp. 672-3.

*Contributions to BULLETIN OF FRIENDS HISTORICAL ASSO-
CIATION:*

Documents. [An account of John Grubb, 1689-1731]. vol. 19
(1930), no. 1, pp. 33-9.

Documents. [Three letters in Dublin Friends' Historical Library: from Morris Birkbeck, 1773; Sarah Hall, aft. Birkbeck, 1772; Thomas Chandlee, 1812.] vol. 24 (1935), no. 2, pp. 99-102.

Contributions to THE FRIEND [London]:

- "A Quaker pilgrimage: (5) In Ireland" and "A Quaker pilgrimage: (6) Through Ireland continuing south." 17 and 24 July 1936, pp. 671-2 and 698-700.
- "A relief centenary—Friends and the Irish Famine." 13 December 1946, pp. 1035-7.
- "The earliest minutes?" 14 May 1954, p. 449.
- "An Irish Friend at Australia General Meeting." 18 Feb. 1955, pp. 165-6.
- "Joseph Pike and ourselves." [Letter] 16 May 1958, pp. 618-9.
- "Edwin B. Jacob" [Obituary]. 26 December 1958, p. 1671.

Contribution to THE FRIEND [Philadelphia]:

- "Irish Quakerism." vol. 103 (1929/30), no. 16, pp. 183-4.

Contributions to the FRIENDS' QUARTERLY EXAMINER:

- "Irish Friends' experiences of war, 1689-92." vol. 50, no. 198, 4th mo. 1916, pp. 169-87.
- "An unpublished memoir" [of Anthony Sharp of Dublin]. vol. 59, no. 234, 4th mo. 1925, pp. 175-84.
- "Quaker ministry in Ireland." vol. 63, no. 251, 7th mo. 1929, pp. 252-68.

Contributions to JOURNAL OF THE FRIENDS' HISTORICAL SOCIETY:

- "Sarah (Lynes) Grubb (1773-1842)." [A note.] vol. 27 (1930), p. 83.
- "A Quaker family carrying pistols." vol. 30 (1933), pp. 47-8.
- "An anti-slavery enthusiast, 1826. [Letters of Joshua Beale (1763-1823) of Cork.]" vol. 31 (1934), pp. 21-26.
- "Margaret Edmundson (c. 1630-1691): her husband's testimony." vol. 33 (1936), pp. 32-34.
- "Irish Quaker records: some items of interest in the Dublin collection." vol. 34 (1937), pp. 29-31.
- "A conscientious objector in the eighteenth century [James Hastie]." vol. 34 (1937), pp. 32-43.
- "American visitors in Ireland: some reminiscences, 1784-1852 [from the diary of Mary Leadbeater, and the recollections of Deborah Martin]." vol. 37 (1940), pp. 25-30.
- "At a Meeting of the midwives in Barbadoes, 11.xii.1677." [Document communicated.] vol. 37 (1940), pp. 22-24.
- "The earliest National Meeting of Friends in Ireland: new evidence as to its date." vol. 38 (1946), pp. 19-20.
- "Elizabeth Fry at Newgate." vol. 38 (1946), pp. 21-23.
- "William Edmundson, 1627-1712, some notes on his family and second marriage." vol. 40 (1948), pp. 32-36.
- "Quaker china." [Notes.] vol. 41 (1949), p. 4; vol. 42 (1950), pp. 90-91.

"The Settlement of church discipline among Irish Friends, with special reference to George Fox's visit, 1669." vol. 45 (1953), pp. 75-80.

"Newtown school, Waterford." [A note.] vol. 49 (1960), p. 183.

Contribution to JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF ANTI-QUARIES OF IRELAND:

"Notes on two prehistoric burial sites in the townland of Seskin, co. Waterford." vol. 74, pt. 3 (30 September 1944), pp. 176-9.

Unpublished material at Friends House Library:

"Social conditions in Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as illustrated by early Quaker records." London University M.A. thesis, 1916. Typescript. 186 pp.

"Friends' books in the library of Archbishop Marsh, Dublin." 1931. Typescript, with accompanying letters.

Friendly Heritage: Letters from the Quaker Past. By Henry J. Cadbury. A Friends' Journal Book, pp. 342. Silvermine Publishers, Norwalk, Connecticut, 1972. \$9.95.

This is a collection of the 240 "letters", or occasional essays, written by Henry Cadbury between 1941 and 1969 for the "Friends Intelligencer" (later merged with another American periodical to form the "Friends' Journal") under the pseudonym "Now and Then".

How is one to attempt to review them? They have no consecutive theme, apart from their Friend content, and were written as the spirit moved their author; but in nearly every case he has some fresh information or insight to give on his subject which will make them of lasting value to the historian, especially to those who share Henry Cadbury's enjoyment in exploring the obscurer paths of history.

If there is one element that is common to perhaps the majority of the essays, it can be found in the author's relish for relating the events of the past to those of the present; clearly this contributed to his choice of his pseudonym. An enforced halt in Lisbon between 'planes during the War leads him to write of Anne Gargill and her surprisingly courteous treatment there in 1655. The vagaries of wartime censorship remind him of the confiscated Quaker letters of the 17th century which are to be found in the Public Record Office. A reference in the "Spectator" to the vocational tendencies of modern Quakerism inspires him to draw on his fund of learning about the occupations of early Friends. And so on.

We will add just a few essay titles, without comment, as a further means of whetting our readers' appetite for what is in store for them in a perusal of this delightful book. "Quaker Sinners", "Robin Hood and the Quakers", "'That of God'—A Moratorium?", "A 'Grave' Mistake", "George Fox and the Beatniks".

A.W.B.