

Recent Publications

Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. By Margaret Spufford. pp. xxiii, 374, Cambridge University Press, 1974, £7.70.

What makes Mrs. Spufford's contribution to our knowledge of three Cambridgeshire villages so important is that she writes on all aspects of village life; not only does she deal with the economic history of Willingham, Chippenham and Orwell but with educational opportunities and the religious beliefs of their inhabitants. These three villages were chosen because they have different soils, contrasting methods of cultivation, and dissimilar social structures, and Dr. Spufford surveys them in the period between the Henrician Reformation and the religious persecution that occurred after Charles II's restoration. Although the three aspects are carefully and skilfully inter-related, Quaker historians will be more interested in the last section on religious dissent and especially in the part played by Friends in the county.

The author shows that much Puritan feeling existed in the county in the 1570s when a group in Balsham was suspected of belonging to the Family of Love and in the 1630s when many parishioners were opposed to the Laudian innovations and petitioned Parliament in 1640-1 against the practices of Dr. Wren, Bishop of Ely. They were clearly anti-episcopalian. In this soil dissenting opinions, Congregationalist, Baptist and Quaker, grew freely between 1640 and 1653. Organized Quakerism came into the county in 1653 when Mary Fisher and Elizabeth Williams talked to scholars at the University and the following year Anne Blackin was sent to gaol. It was probably this happening which caused James Parnell to come to the county and to work in it for six months in the early part of 1655 before he moved into Essex where, at the age of eighteen, he was martyred.

But Mrs. Spufford has shown from Baptist sources that Quakers or people with Quaker beliefs were present in 1651-2. This is an original contribution; but, it seems, there is no doubt that Baptists were struggling to maintain a hold over their members who were attracted by the view that the Scriptures could be tested by the Spirit rather than the Spirit by the Scriptures. Widow Pepper of Over said in 1653 "I have seen that to love, to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry is enough", and, therefore, that she could no longer come to Baptist meetings, and, the following year, Sister Sneesby of the same village was tormented by the need to choose between Baptist and Quaker meetings, finally joining the latter. By 1657, Friends were fully organized and from that year Quaker marriages were recorded in a Register Book.

Opposition between Baptists and Quakers was considerable and the tone of debates between them was not very high. Debates and

pamphlets exacerbated the conflict and, while it continued, the Congregationalists gained ground. With these latter early Friends did not at first clash for it was not until 1676 that they debated with them on predestination. There were probably about 600 Quakers in the county, a strong representation although not approaching the numbers in Yorkshire, Wiltshire and Somerset. The author has much to say of the social status of early Friends and her findings in various places, notably Swavesey, lead her to question Richard Vann's thesis that the first generation of Friends was richer than the post-1660 converts. Her findings are based largely on the Hearth Tax returns of 1674, but, she admits, and in this she is wise, that her numbers are not large enough for statistical treatment. Dr. Spufford's book is essential reading for all those Quaker historians who want to learn something of the economic and social background of the period in which Quakerism was born.

GERALD A. J. HODGETT

A History of Friends' School, Lisburn. By Neville H. Newhouse. Pp. 148; 20 plates. Privately printed under the auspices of the Board of Governors. 1974.

This book, which commemorates the bicentenary of Lisburn School, is a welcome addition to our histories of Friends' schools. The author was himself Headmaster for nine years, and although his account comes to an end some time before his own headmastership began, his intimate knowledge of the School, and its traditions and "atmosphere", make his assessment of past events particularly valuable and convincing.

Neville Newhouse does not withhold occasional criticism, either from the School Governors or from successive headmasters, but his comments are always charitable and full of understanding, and the prevailing impression left is of dedication and devotion on both sides, and a record of which Friends in Ireland can be justly proud.

There are sufficient extracts from other writers to diversify the narrative without destroying its continuity, and some well-chosen illustrations. Altogether a most attractive book.

A.W.B.

Quaker by Convincement. By Geoffrey Hubbard. (Penguin Books. 45p). Admirable account of Quakerism for the general reader; solidly based on historical fairness and fact, without being just another history of the Society.

Victorian Nonconformity: Documents of Modern History. Edited by John Briggs and Ian Sellers. Edward Arnold, 1973. pp. vii, 180. £3. (Also available in paperback, price £1.50.)

This is a useful collection of extracts dealing with various facets of nonconformity in Victorian England, drawn from a wide range of sources, grave and gay. There is nothing, however, relating specifically to Quakerism.