

## The Press and Quakerism 1653-1659\*

IT is a commonplace of seventeenth century historical studies, that the Press only played an important part in national life during periods of maximum political crisis, such as 1641-1650, 1659-1660 and 1679-1681. Historians have tended to neglect questions about the Press outside of these periods precisely because they assume that except in times of crisis it was not playing a significant role. In this article it will be argued that the Press did play an important part in one significant aspect of national life in the years 1653-1659, and that this should prompt us to reconsider our view of its influence in the second half of the seventeenth century as a whole. The Press can be seen to have been playing an important part in forming the response of the political nation to the early Quaker movement, and was seen to be doing so not only by the early Quakers, but by those who chose to enter into printed controversy with them. The Quakers are of interest not only because they have been the subject of a considerable amount of scholarly attention in recent years, but also because of the extent to which many of the reasons given in print for prosecuting them in these years, prefigure many of those used for attacking Dissent as a whole after 1660. The evidence set out below will deal firstly with the significance of Press activity to the early movement. The second section will examine anti-Quaker pamphlets as evidence of the concern felt by many about the Quaker use of the Press, and of the stereotyped image they give of the early movement. In the third section the newsbooks of the years 1653-1659 will be examined to show how derogatory images were repeated and given wide circulation among influential groups in what, with some justice, can be called official publications. This will show how important a role the printed word was playing in one sensitive area of national life in the relatively stable years of the Protectorate.<sup>1</sup>

\* I am grateful to Dr. D. F. Allen for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this article.

<sup>1</sup> See Barry Reay in his "The Quakers, 1659, and the Restoration of the Monarchy", *History*, vol. 63 no. 208 (1978), pp. 193-213. Though it is important to be aware of the role the Quakers played in the politics of these years, it is equally important to remember that in 1659 there were many more significant factors operating on the national political stage than a reading of Barry Reay's article would lead us to believe.

## I

The early Quakers were keenly aware of the importance and efficacy of the Press as a means of disseminating their views. In *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore* (1659) George Fox replied to 110 individuals who had attacked Quakers in writing or by word of mouth in the previous six years. Of these at least 62 were printed attacks directed specifically against the Quakers. Yet this is only one example of Quaker interest in the Press, an interest which reached back to the beginnings of the movement in the early 1650's. Indeed the prodigious output of the early Quakers has often been noted by writers on Quaker history, and a recent numerical study has shown a steady increase in Quaker publications from 53 in 1653 to 210 separate titles in 1659.<sup>2</sup>

The correspondence of the early Quakers indicates both an interest and a trust in the efficacy of the printed word. A letter, probably from Thomas Aldam to Margaret Fell written about 1653, contains the suggestion that "there might be meanes amongst you used to send forth 2 or 3 who are made free to followe such a Callinge as to keepe the Markets in your County with Bookes." In an earlier letter he had written, "I would have thee write as often as thou canst to mee for what Bookes frends would have, they are Bookes which will be very serviseable for weake frends, & I have passed many Bookes abroad in these parts, & they are very serviseable in Convinceinge the world."<sup>3</sup> Edward Burrough reflected this belief when he asked Margaret Fell for books to be sent to Ireland, asserting that they "might be very serviceable in spreading forth ye truth".<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the early Quakers were concerned about their public image. They kept a close eye on the "diurnalls", or newsbooks of the period, often recounting to each other the content of those which were of specific interest to them. An item in one newsbook about James Nayler, the leading Quaker tried and convicted by Parliament in 1656 for

<sup>2</sup> D. Runyon "Types of Quaker Writings by Year 1650-1699", in H. Barbour and A. Roberts eds., *Early Quaker Writings* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1973), pp. 568-9.

<sup>3</sup> Friends House Library, (T. Aldam) to M. Fell (1653?), A.R. Barclay [A.R.B.] MSS 159; T. Aldam to G. Fox, May 1652, *ibid.* 71.

<sup>4</sup> Friends House Library, E. Burrough to M. Fell, Jan. 5. 1656, Swarthmore [Sw.] MSS iii, 16.

blasphemy, helped create considerable concern among the Quakers of Plymouth where it was reported that "many stumbles and is ofended".<sup>5</sup> In George Fox's *Journal* we learn of the lengths to which Quakers would go in order to protect themselves from the aspersions cast upon them in the newsbooks. A report written by Henry Walker in *Perfect Proceedings* prompted Fox to visit him. This was followed by a visit from three other Quakers, who subsequently published a denunciation of Walker and other producers of newsbooks. Two months later the Quakers attacked Robert Wood and George Horton, producers of the *Faithful Scout*, in which "is found many lies and slanders against those people whom he scornfully calls Quakers".<sup>6</sup>

They were also keen to answer the many printed attacks made upon them which appeared in pamphlet form, and replies to such attacks form a prominent part of Quaker output in these years.<sup>7</sup> Quaker response to these attacks was often swift, reflecting the confidence they had in the power of the Press to persuade. In one place Fox boasts:

And about this time the Church Faith was given forth, which was made at Savoy in eleven days time: and I got a copy of it before it was published, and writ an answer to it. And when their book Church Faith were sold up and down the streets, my answer to it was sold also.

Sometimes this confidence gave way to mild doubts about too much publicity resulting from too frequent use of the Press. In 1653 it was considered possible to ask Margaret Fell's husband, Judge Fell, who was not a Quaker, to take some manuscripts to the presses for the Quakers. Within four years his attitude had changed, so much so that his wife had to warn Gerrard Roberts to make sure a book "Com forth Speedely and Bee Sent Abrode, before my Husband Com up to London, lest hee sight of it and prevent the Sarvice of it".<sup>8</sup> Judge Fell's hostility may have had a minor motive. For

<sup>5</sup> T. Salthouse to G. Fox, 9. Nov. 1656, *ibid.* iii, 157.

<sup>6</sup> G. Fox, *Journal* (ed. J. L. Nickalls, Cambridge, 1952), pp. 201-2; Anon, *A Declaration from the Children of Light* British Library [B.L.] E 838 (11), dated May 14 1655; *Perfect Proceedings* 12/4-19/4/1655; A. Stoddard *et al.*, *Something written in Answer* (B. L. E 848(14), 17 July 1655), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Runyon, *op. cit.*, p. 574

<sup>8</sup> Fox, *op. cit.*, p. 350-1; F. Howgill to M. Fell, (1653), A. R. B. MSS 76; Friends House Library, M. Fell to G. Roberts, 21 October 1657, Spence MSS iii, 49.

Several members of the Boate family were testified against for their "disorderly walking." Samuel Boate was disowned in 1735 for running up bills, refusing to pay his creditors, and for "leaving the nation."<sup>65</sup> Gershon Boate the Younger, already noted for his fighting spirit, was disowned in 1735 for having a child by a servant. Boate, left with three small children at the death of his wife, had kept the maid in his house even after being cautioned by family and Friends—thus precipitating his downfall.<sup>66</sup>

One of the most significant developments for Ballymurray Friends came in the winter of 1739–1740, when a small Quaker community of weavers left its former home at Newport (County Mayo) and removed to County Roscommon—settling mainly at Killarney and Galey near Ballymurray. This Newport Quaker group had originally come into existence at almost the same time that Sligo Friends were moving to Ballymurray. Starting in 1719 and coming from Drogheda and Dublin in Leinster and from Rathfryland Meeting (County Down) and Dunclady Meeting (County Derry) in Ulster, members of the Cantrell, Evans, Kelly, Maga (Magaw, McGae, etc.), Peck, Sutcliffe, Taylor and other families settled in Newport, largely at the instigation of Captain Pratt. They earned a rather precarious existence from linen weaving, so that they needed assistance from their fellow-Quakers on several occasions.<sup>67</sup> Some of them, in hope of a better financial future, removed to America in 1730, while others decided to continue the struggle a while longer in Newport. This small community also had its problems of "discipline." In 1720, shortly after their arrival, William Warding was testified against for causing the Truth to suffer in several ways.<sup>68</sup> Samuel Kennin (Kenning, Kennan) was disowned in 1723 for drunkenness and for "marrying out."<sup>69</sup> William Magae condemned his earlier "outgoing in marriage" at the beginning of 1727, while Susanna Cantrell did likewise at the beginning of 1728.<sup>70</sup> Only one Friends' wedding, that of Thomas McClung and Elizabeth Evans (in March 1726),

<sup>65</sup> Moate Monthly Meeting Denials (H.6), p. 48.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51. Gershon Boate the younger was also dealt with in 1729 for having shot his landlord's sow.

<sup>67</sup> See *Jnl. F.H.S.*, 54 (1976), 15–27.

<sup>68</sup> Moate Men's Meeting Minutes (H. 7), p. 188b.

<sup>69</sup> Moate Monthly Meeting Denials (H.6), p. 40.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

1714 and which had been "settled" in 1715 or 1716,<sup>48</sup> ceased to exist in 1717. In spite of the disappearance of a Sligo Quaker community, travelling Friends were still drawn to that area for several more generations. John Fothergill (1676–1745) and Benjamin Holme (1683–1749), for example, held a meeting in the "Sessions-house" there on December 23, 1724, noting that "the Sheriff and several more of the People [present] being very loving."<sup>49</sup> Mary Peisley Neale (1717–1757), and her English companion, Catharine Payton (1727–1794), visited "the towns-people of Sligo in Connaught, and felt much satisfaction; she thought they were well worth visiting, and said there seemed much more openness to declare the Truth amongst those of other societies, than amongst them that go under our name."<sup>50</sup> Two American Quakers, John Pemberton (1727–1795) and William Matthews (1732–1792) held a meeting at Sligo in 1783.<sup>51</sup> Mary Dudley (1750–1823), an English Friend who for a period resided in Ireland, held an appointed meeting in the Presbyterian meeting house at Sligo in 1795 and reported that "A large number of solid people attended, who seemed disposed to receive the doctrines of Truth; indeed I trust some bowed under its precious influence."<sup>52</sup>

Those Quakers who left Sligo for County Roscommon in 1717 settled at or near Ballymurray (also called Mary's Town), about three miles south-southeast of the town of Roscommon and about ten miles from Athlone. In November 1717 it was reported that they had "not yet settled to satisfaction." Within six months, however, it was noted that not only were they now comfortably settled but that some other Friends from other sections of Ireland had also arrived—so that "a meeting is settled there for the Worship of God."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> National Book for Recording Epistles and Papers from the Provinces, etc. (A. 20), epistle from National Half-Years Meeting to London Yearly Meeting dated 3rd Month 10th, 1716.

<sup>49</sup> John Fothergill, *An account of the life and travels . . . of John Fothergill* 1753 p. 222; *The Friends' Library*, XIII, 409.

<sup>50</sup> *The Friends' Library*, XI, 94.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 313.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV, 332. Mary Dudley gives a lengthy description of this meeting and of her discussions with those who had attended, reporting "My very soul cleaved to some of the inhabitants of Sligo, and the remembrance of having been there is precious". (Mary Dudley, *Life*, 1825, p. 205).

<sup>53</sup> National Half-Year's Meeting Minutes, II (A. 3), minutes for 8th to 11th, 9th Month, 1717, and 8th to 10th of 9th Month, 1718.

Quakers on matters relating to points of finance, distribution and control was good enough and flexible enough to meet the needs created by their awareness of, and commitment to the Press as a means of propagating their views.<sup>14</sup>

The main uses to which they put this interest and organisation were to propagate their beliefs and to defend themselves against attack. Use was made of the printed word to spread the word abroad as well as at home. Books were used as part of the missionary work in Ireland, Barbados, Holland, Germany, and Wales during the 1650's. At home the tactic of using an imprisonment or a court hearing as an excuse to distribute books was being employed as early as 1653, when Thomas Aldam used the public interest aroused by a court hearing as an opportunity to give away books. In September 1654 Richard Hubberthorne wrote to Edward Burrough thanking him for sending some books whilst he had been before a court, for "the bookes came to us in a convenient season upon ye 3 day when they weare endinge ye sessions & we gave about 12 of them amonge the aldermen which was servisable".<sup>15</sup>

Another use to which they put the presses was to appeal to central government. Many of their books contained addresses to prominent political figures, including Cromwell. Between 1653 and 1659 they issued sixty-three titles which can be classified as being mainly concerned with appealing to the leaders of the nation.<sup>16</sup> This figure does not include all appeals made in other forms of publication, nor does it reflect their interest in ensuring that certain key figures received books from them. Among these, Cromwell, General Monk and other army officers are of particular interest. References to books written primarily for Cromwell's eyes are common

<sup>14</sup> T. Aldam to G. Fox, (1653), Sw. MSS iii, 39; R. Farnsworth to G. Fox, 1653, *ibid.* iii, 52; J. Nayler to G. Fox, 1652, *ibid.* iii, 64; J. Whitehead to G. Fox, 20 Nov. 1659, *ibid.* iv, 178; R. Hubberthorne to G. Fox, 16 Feb. 1658, *ibid.* iv, 15.

<sup>15</sup> J. Rous & H. Fell to M. Fell, 24 May 1657, Sw. MSS i, 79; R. Waller & R. Roper to M. Fell, 24 July 1657, *ibid.* iv, 23; J. Lawson & R. Hubberthorne to M. Fell (1653), *ibid.* iv, 66; *ibid.* i, 397 for accounts relating to books sent to France, Jersey and Virginia in 1656; W. Ames to M. Fell, 2 Sept. 1656, A. R. B. MSS 3; G. Rose to G. Fox, 23 June 1659, *ibid.* 55; T. Aldam to M. Fell, 3 April 1653, Sw. MSS iii, 43; R. Hubberthorne to E. Burrough, 27 Sept. 1654, *ibid.* iv, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Runyon, *op. cit.*, pp. 568-9.

in the correspondence of these years, and the distribution of books among soldiers is equally well represented. Major Packer saved Thomas Aldam's quota of books from a hostile mob outside Whitehall, and "did desire I would give him one of them." As late as December 1659 Thomas Rawlinson was supposed to be seeing that two hundred books got delivered to the officers of the army. In 1656 a Scottish soldier was trying to get books printed, probably for distribution among the Scottish soldiery. Something of more interest emerges from 1659, about which William Caton wrote:

When I was at Edenborough I endeavoured two or three times to speake with Geo. Monke but could not have acesse to him; And therefore it came the more upon mee to write to him: & to the Army, the wch. friends desired much to have printed, and soe it was, & I hope pritty well dispersed among the souldery who were pritty respective & courteous towards me.<sup>17</sup>

If the Quakers were keen to appeal to government through the Press, then the authorities in their turn were keen to keep an eye on Quaker Press activity. Quakers were arrested and harassed for distributing books, as well as having books confiscated.<sup>18</sup> Twice in the 1650's the government acted against the Quakers' printer Giles Calvert. Although never a Quaker, he printed nearly three hundred titles for them, over half in the years 1655 and 1656; and had close links with the movement, attending meetings, supplying money, and acting as a forwarding address for letters.<sup>19</sup> In February 1655, on the strength of two reports from Leicestershire and soon after

<sup>17</sup> For two early references to Cromwell see, T. Aldam to G. Fox, 1654, Sw. MSS iii, 38 and T. Aldam to A. Stoddard, 21 June 1653, A. R. B. MSS 17. T. Aldam to G. Fox, 1654, Sw. MSS iii, 38; M. Fell Jnr. to M. Fell Sr., 3 Dec. 1659, Spence MSS iii, 65; T. Willan & G. Taylor to M. Fell, 6 Dec. 1656, Sw. MSS i, 293; W. Caton to G. Fox, 20 Dec. 1659, *ibid.* iv, 268.

<sup>18</sup> Friends House Library, *The case of William Salt, (1656)*, Original Records of Sufferings, MSS iii, 285; J. Besse, *Sufferings* (London, 1753), Vol. 1 pp. 113-4, 150, 331, 528, 657-8, 661-2, 709, Vol. 2 pp. 50-6; *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe* (London, 1742), Vol. 4 pp. 409, 531, 642; *Calender of State Papers, Domestic [C.S.P.D.] 1656-1657*, pp. 229-31, 351-2.

<sup>19</sup> On Calvert see, A. E. Terry, *Giles Calvert, Mid-Seventeenth Century English Bookseller and Publisher* (University of Columbia, School of Library Science M.Sc. thesis, 1937), especially pp. 26-8 on his relations with the Council of State; also R. S. Mortimer, "Biographical Notices of Printers and Publishers of Friends' Books up to 1750", *Journal of Documentation*, 3, 2 (1947), p. 110; for evidence of Calvert's relations with the Quakers see, letters and accounts in Sw. MSS i, 162, 208, 209, 250, 252, 263, 285, 303, 374.

The first Quakers known to have been active in Galway were Humphrey Norton, William Shaw, and John Stubbs, all of whom were there in 1656. Little is known about their work in that city. William Shaw (d. 1658) was one of the first "Publishers of Truth" in Norway. He may have made several journeys to Galway. On one occasion, perhaps his first visit there, Shaw may have been travelling by himself. After having been turned out of Limerick (where Colonel Ingoldsby would allow no "strange" Friends to enter the city to proclaim Quakerism),<sup>7</sup> he was reported to be on the road to Galway when he was badly beaten by a trooper "simply for being a Quaker." On another occasion, it would seem, Shaw was travelling with Humphrey Norton. Both of them were placed under guard in Limerick and also (either before or after the Limerick experience) were taken from a meeting at Samuel Newton's house in Galway, expelled from that city, and not allowed to "fetch" their horses.<sup>8</sup> Shaw, on still another occasion, was in Galway with John Stubbs. The two of them were imprisoned five weeks for speaking a few words in a "steeple-house" there.<sup>9</sup> This last episode, taking place in late 1656, is the only one which can be dated with any reasonable accuracy. The "Great Book of Sufferings," probably begun in 1661 but incorporating a list of earlier sufferings, seems to suggest a date of 1655 for all of these episodes, but that assignment does not bear up under close scrutiny. Samuel Buckley very late in 1656 wrote to Margaret Fell that "John Stubbs and W. Shaw is in outward bonds at Gallyway [Galway]."<sup>10</sup>

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Malin (Malins, Maylin, etc.) spent much time in the West Indies and may have reached the American mainland. The best known, William Edmundson, has left us his well-known *Journal*, which deals with his discovery of Quakerism in 1653, when on a visit to England, and his life-long travels in religious service at home and abroad. The Cookes, Turner, and Lynch were primarily active in Ireland, although several of them did visit England and Turner eventually removed to America.

<sup>7</sup> National Sufferings, I (1655-1693), 7. This manuscript volume, numbered A. 11, is found in Friends' Historical Library, Dublin.

<sup>8</sup> National Sufferings, I (A. 11), 7, 10. Norton and Shaw were also imprisoned in Wexford, where they were taken from a meeting for worship, carried forcibly into a "public house of worship" to hear the sermon, and then imprisoned for speaking after the sermon was over.

<sup>9</sup> National Sufferings, I (A. 11), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Friends House Library, Swarthmore MSS I, 392 (Tr. I, 177), dated 11th Month 1656 (January 1656/7).

especially after 1655, their continued hostility towards the Quakers, and the fact that they had a wide national circulation possibly carried the day for those who wished to make the association of Quakerism and subversion explicit and widespread. They reinforced and gave official sanction to many of the views circulating in anti-Quaker publications and, in spite of determined efforts by the Quakers, helped make sure that by 1659 the link between Quakerism and subversion was well established in the minds of many of the political nation.

It would be wrong of course to attribute the heavy prosecution that the Quakers endured in these years solely to the influence of the Press, but that it was an important factor, and was seen to be so by contemporaries has been shown in the evidence set out above.<sup>41</sup> The Press, it has been argued, must be seen as a consistently active agent, mediating the relationship between the Quakers, the government and the public. It played an important role in the internal development of the movement, and the adverse images disseminated in anti-Quaker publications, and in the newsbooks of these years did much to create the climate of distrust which greeted the Quakers during the Protectorate and the early years of the Restoration. The Quakers were aware of the power of the Press to influence opinion against them, and as has been shown devoted considerable energy to making sure that their voice was heard. In the short term however the appeal to stereotyped adverse interpretations on the part of the relatively orthodox anti-Quaker authors and the official newsbooks proved to be in closer harmony with the views of the members of the politically influential classes, than did any position put forward by the Quakers.

The strength of the belief in the power of the Press to influence the opinions of those people who mattered politically, as exemplified by the activities of the Quakers, the government through its official newsbooks and the anti-Quaker writers, should prompt us to consider how far it may have influenced opinion on other issues. Many of the problems associated with the position of Dissent after 1660, and the

<sup>41</sup> For details of Quaker Sufferings, see *A Declaration of the Present Sufferings of . . . the . . . Quakers* (1659), p. 1, and W. C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism* (2nd ed., Cambridge 1961), p. 9.

agent of the Pope. William Prynne was one of the staunchest proponents of the idea that papists were "the chief Speakers and Rulers in most separate Congregations, and particularly amongst the Quakers," and it was an opinion he shared with most of his fellow anti-Quaker authors.<sup>26</sup>

The most consistent non-theological theme to which anti-Quaker writers returned again and again, was the notion that they posed a serious threat to the social order. A symptom of this threat to the basic fabric of society was the itinerant Quaker preacher. The basic, much repeated complaint was voiced as early as 1653:

Is this a peaceable harmlesse way for a man to leave his wife and children and to run about and let them shift for themselves . . . I thought this had been a disorder, that any should voluntarily leap out of that calling, and break off that Relation God had set & fixed them in.<sup>27</sup>

The Quaker practice of addressing all people in the same way, regardless of rank, was seen as another assault on the social order, as was their habit of keeping their hats on in the presence of social superiors. The implications of such behaviour were, as one writer saw it, clear:

Though they would cover over such actions with the guiled shew of humility, yet doth it directly tend to overthrow all government and authority amongst men; for take away outward honour and respect from superiors, and what government can subsist long among them?<sup>28</sup>

More seriously the Quaker refusal to swear oaths and pay tithes, along with their attack on the ministry of all other denominations, and what was construed as a direct attack on magistracy itself received extensive coverage from anti-Quaker authors.<sup>29</sup> Having highlighted the threat posed by the Quakers to basic institutions of civil society, the conclusion was obvious, and often repeated: "What could not be done by Seekers, Levellers, Arminians, and Ranters, shall be now better carried on by Quakers, the sublimat of them

<sup>26</sup> W. Prynne, *The Quakers Unmasked* (1655), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Anon, *The Querers and the Quakers cause* (1653), pp. 11-2.

<sup>28</sup> J. Clapham, *A Full Discovery and Confutation* (1656), p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> On oaths: J. Stalham, *The Reviler Rebuked* (1657), p. 235. On tithes: R. Baxter, *One Sheet against the Quakers* (1657), p. 6. On the Ministry: I. Bourne, *A Defence and Justification of Ministers Maintenance* (1659), p. 72. On Magistrates: Weld *et al.*, *The Perfect Pharisee* (1654), p. 33.

all." This association of Quakerism with social subversion was the theme which, besides certain theological ones, occurred most often in anti-Quaker pamphlets. From the earliest printed attacks the cry was uniform: they had gleaned their learning from Winstanley, and so believed that all things ought to be in common, from which it followed that they meant to destroy the fabric of social relations, for as one writer put it, "Magistrate, People, Husband, Wife, Parents, Children, Master, Servant, all alike, no difference in the Quakers Religion."<sup>30</sup>

Having reached this conclusion the writers would often call for the suppression of the movement. One view was, "we see how necessary it is that both Magistrate and Ministers, with united hearts and hands endeavour to oppose and suppress these errors and heresies."<sup>31</sup> Even though a request like this was not always made, the tone and content of many of the pamphlets could leave the reader in no doubt about how the majority of the writers felt.

Anti-Quaker writers then were conscious of the power of the medium they employed and used it to try and undermine the position of the Quakers. They were concerned to warn their chosen audience, and through them the wider reading public of the threat they saw in the Quaker movement. In doing so they tended to characterise the Quakers in traditional ways that most literate people would understand, associating them with, atheists, papists, levellers etc., thereby giving concrete expression to fears and suspicions of the motives of the early movement. This helped to spread the notion, common by 1659, that Quakerism led automatically to social subversion. The truth or falsity of many of the accusations are not in question here, for what matters is that they were made in print by men confident that the medium they employed could influence, not only people in their local congregation or town, but also J. P.'s, lawyers and politicians.

### III

We can assume that the lower down the social order one was in this period, the more likely one was to be

<sup>30</sup> C. Gilbert, *The Libertine School'd* (1657), p. 19; F. Higginson, *A Brief Relation* (1653), p. 26; T. Collier, *A Looking-Glasse for the Quakers* (1656), p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> S. Morriss, *A Looking-Glasse for the Quakers* (1655), p. 4.

illiterate.<sup>32</sup> If in addition the J. P.'s, clergymen and local worthies responsible for prosecuting the Quakers were among the literate classes, it is not unreasonable to assume that many of them were guided in their interpretation of Quaker activities, as we have seen, by pamphlets issued by anti-Quaker writers. Even if such people did not read any of these pamphlets, it is highly probable that they read one of the newsbooks issued weekly from London during the years 1653-1659. Spawned in the years preceding the Civil War, the newsbook came to maturity, and was popular with both the masses and the influential, during the years of civil conflict. In 1649, 1653 and again in 1655 they became subject to more stringent government controls.<sup>33</sup> Although they may have lost some of their vitality after 1649, it would be wrong to assume that their influence was diminished significantly. The Civil War had helped foster and cultivate a desire for newsbooks. In the 1650's the market was still there, but the numbers and content of the newsbooks were kept in control by the government in a way that they had not been in the previous decade. The newsbooks of the 1650's then were to a greater or lesser extent organs of officialdom.

Government control of the newsbooks reached its zenith after August 1655, when only two licensed ones appeared each week, the rest having been taken off the streets by the authorities. If there was one consistent theme about their coverage of the Quakers, that theme was hostility. This was so until May 1659, when John Canne replaced Marchmont Needham as official editor of the newsbooks. Then, the need to secure sympathetic support from as many sources as possible for the "Good Old Cause" led to reports being published which attempted to contradict rumours about Quakers and Anabaptists rising to cut throats and bring about chaos. These rumours were, quite rightly, seen as attempts by Royalists to promote the cause of Charles II by promoting divisions within the ranks of those still sympathetic to the Commonwealth form of government. But

<sup>32</sup> D. Cressy "Levels of Illiteracy in England, 1530-1730", *Historical Journal*, 20, 1, (1977), pp. 22-3.

<sup>33</sup> On the newsbooks of the Civil War see A. N. B. Cotton, "London Newsbooks in the Civil War: Their Political attitudes and Sources of Information" (Unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1971). For the 1650's see, J. Frank, *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper 1620-1660* (Harvard U. P., 1961), pp. 199-267.

these reports came too late from an official Press which for the previous six years had been consistently hostile towards the Quakers.<sup>34</sup>

Quaker interest in the contents of the newsbooks has already been noted—it was a well warranted one. Notices advertising anti-Quaker books appeared in June, July, August and October of 1653, initiating a practice which was to continue throughout these years.<sup>35</sup> The earliest full reference to the Quakers appears in the *Faithful Scout* in October 1653, in which they were equated with Shakers, Ranters, Seekers, Hugonists, and Singers, and it claimed that “These sixe Sects hold all things in communis, and that it is lawful to committ all manner of wickedness.” During 1654, with the beginning of the Quakers’ drive southwards, the number of hostile references to them increases slightly, but by the middle of the following year it had risen to a flood. Increased Quaker activity in the south of England, and the proclamation of February 1655, which according to the historian of the early Quakers was “a powerful persuasive to persecution” were the two major factors contributing to this increase.<sup>36</sup> Between January and October 1655, hardly a fortnight passed without some invariably derogatory reference to the Quakers. This interest subsided in the following three years, with the least number of attacks coming in 1658.<sup>37</sup>

The newsbooks then, reported a wide variety of incidents in which the Quakers had a place, usually presenting them in the worst possible light. Stories of them disrupting Church services, and of their appearances before magistrates were common. Bizarre stories about witchcraft were given prominence, as was an odd, but sinister one about some Quakers who claimed they had poisoned the Mayor of Newcastle.

<sup>34</sup> The reports appear in: *Mercurius Politicus* 21/7–28/7/1659, 18/8–25/8/1659, 24/8–1/9/1659; and in, *Publick Intelligencer* 22/7–29/7/1659, 15/8–22/8/1659. One report “seems to have been raised by Charls Stuarts Agents, during the time of this Rebellion, on purpose to inflame it” (*Mercurius Politicus* 18/8–25/8/1659).

<sup>35</sup> I have counted 7 advertisements for 5 books in 1653; 4 for 3 in 1654; 17 for 8 in 1655; 6 for 6 in 1656; 4 for 4 in 1657; 4 for 5 in 1658; and, 4 for 2 in 1659.

<sup>36</sup> *Faithful Scout* 30/9–7/10/1653; W. C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (2nd ed., Cambridge 1970), p. 181.

<sup>37</sup> In the following figures I counted each copy of a newsbook which carried an attack on, or hostile account of the Quakers. 1653, 6; 1654, 18; 1655, 84; 1656, 25; 1657, 17; 1658, 6.

Instances when Quaker behaviour caused a breach of the peace were highlighted, as when as a result of their activities in one area “the whole Parish was suddenly together by the ears.”<sup>38</sup> The story of James Nayler’s trial and punishment received extensive adverse publicity. The majority of the stories tended to make explicit, in one way or another, the sinister threat the movement posed to the civil and religious order of the nation. In April 1656 it was reported that they “make their boast here, that they are many thousands strong, and begin to look high and speak bigg; so that the Magistrates as well as Ministers had need to be watchfull”. Later in the same year a report was printed suggesting that they were trying to influence elections.<sup>39</sup> A typical example of this sort of reporting, the type that sees all their actions as a social and religious threat, is to be found in 1655 in a report from Gloucestershire which manages to combine suspicion of their motives, criticism of their methods of gaining converts, with the suggestion that they are associated with the “malignants,” or cavaliers:

The Quakers increase wonderfully . . . they are very fierce and violent in their way, damning all that are not of their opinion. They have had severall meetings in a great common neer Glocester, called Corslawn, whither many hundreds of them resort, the noise of whom draw many of the ignorant Country people together, and some malignants have been observed to be at their meetings . . . They scatter their Pamphlets in all places, whereby many simple ignorant people are seduced by them . . . they teach their Prosilites . . . to rail against the Ministers, whom they call Priests, and not to hear them. Their pamphlets are common in all these parts and more perused then the Bible by their followers. And there are some persons of eminency in these parts, from whom it was not to be expected, do too much own them.<sup>40</sup>

Stories like these, echoing and amplifying the fears outlined in the anti-Quaker pamphlets described above, were, as the Quakers realised, doing much damage to the image of the early movement. The “official” status of these publications,

<sup>38</sup> *Moderate Publisher* 19/11–2/12/1653; *Faithful Scout* 25/11–2/12/1653; *Several Proceedings of Parliament* 22/11–29/11/1653, for variant accounts of the same story. *Several Proceedings in Parliament* 18/1–25/1/1655; *Perfect Proceedings* 19/7–26/7/1655; *Perfect Diurnal* 17/9–24/9/1655; *Perfect Proceedings* 22/2–1/3/1655; *Mercurius Politicus* 28/5–4/6/1657; *Public Intelligence* 11/1–18/1/1658.

<sup>39</sup> *Mercurius Politicus* 17/4–24/4/1656; *ibid.* 21/8 28/8/1656.

<sup>40</sup> *Perfect Proceedings* 2/8–9/8/1655.

especially after 1655, their continued hostility towards the Quakers, and the fact that they had a wide national circulation possibly carried the day for those who wished to make the association of Quakerism and subversion explicit and widespread. They reinforced and gave official sanction to many of the views circulating in anti-Quaker publications and, in spite of determined efforts by the Quakers, helped make sure that by 1659 the link between Quakerism and subversion was well established in the minds of many of the political nation.

It would be wrong of course to attribute the heavy prosecution that the Quakers endured in these years solely to the influence of the Press, but that it was an important factor, and was seen to be so by contemporaries has been shown in the evidence set out above.<sup>41</sup> The Press, it has been argued, must be seen as a consistently active agent, mediating the relationship between the Quakers, the government and the public. It played an important role in the internal development of the movement, and the adverse images disseminated in anti-Quaker publications, and in the newsbooks of these years did much to create the climate of distrust which greeted the Quakers during the Protectorate and the early years of the Restoration. The Quakers were aware of the power of the Press to influence opinion against them, and as has been shown devoted considerable energy to making sure that their voice was heard. In the short term however the appeal to stereotyped adverse interpretations on the part of the relatively orthodox anti-Quaker authors and the official newsbooks proved to be in closer harmony with the views of the members of the politically influential classes, than did any position put forward by the Quakers.

The strength of the belief in the power of the Press to influence the opinions of those people who mattered politically, as exemplified by the activities of the Quakers, the government through its official newsbooks and the anti-Quaker writers, should prompt us to consider how far it may have influenced opinion on other issues. Many of the problems associated with the position of Dissent after 1660, and the

<sup>41</sup> For details of Quaker Sufferings, see *A Declaration of the Present Sufferings of . . . the . . . Quakers* (1659), p. 1, and W. C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism* (2nd ed., Cambridge 1961), p. 9.

failure of Charles II and James II's successive attempts at toleration might be illuminated by a closer study of the way the Press was, and was seen to be forming the attitudes of the political nation. Were there not evidence to suggest, as has been shown, that the Press was playing an important part in one sensitive area of national political life during the relatively stable years of the Protectorate; then the assumption that it only played an important role during times of acute national political crisis could go unchallenged. Closer study of certain topics, such as Quakerism and the Press, proves that evidence does exist, and so the assumption must be challenged. In the light of the evidence presented in this article, it is possible to begin to reconsider our ideas on the role of the Press in late seventeenth century England, and to recognise that it was playing a more active and influential role during periods of relative stability than it has hitherto been fashionable to assert.

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