

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Encounter with Silence: Reflections from the Quaker tradition. By John Punshon. Friends United Press, Richmond, Indiana, and QHS. 1987. £3.75.

To review this book for the Friends' Historical Society is not to comment on it as a devotional exercise or as an exposition of the writer's understanding of Quakerism, but to consider his attitude to history, and in particular to Quaker history.

In one way, the book is itself an historical document, a 'Testimony to the Lord's dealings with John Punshon' in a form which strongly recalls Quaker journals of the past; and as he tells of his experience John Punshon calls in the traditional Quaker vocabulary ("convincement", "measure", "light", "truth", "baptisms", "ministry", "gathering") to explain what happened to him and to define the experiences they encapsulate.

He also justifies this approach in general terms. He sees 'the insight of a particular group of Christians into the nature of their faith as the wellspring of their distinctive worship' and adds 'The public aspect is primarily remembrance, the private aspect, experience. The ideal is harmony between the two. Perhaps the most important function of public worship is to tell the story of the group, how it began, what it has been through, and how God has dealt with it'. Since Quakers do not observe 'the Lord's Supper' as 'a living reminder of the life of Jesus' and 'a two thousand-year-old link with his first disciples'; and nor do we observe the cyclical landmarks of the Christian Year, Lent and saints' days, we find our own way to recall our values and concerns through figures like John Woolman, Isaac Pennington, James Nayler, Margaret Fell, Rufus Jones and Lucretia Mott with incidents like Fox on Pendle Hill, Woolman's Indian Journey, Caroline Stephen's first Meeting, and passages from their writings in our official handbooks.

There is, however, an important difference: for other Christians the Eucharist or Supper, Easter or Lenten observance, are not merely remembrance but re-enactment of historical events. Friends do indeed climb Pendle Hill 'with much ado' in re-enactment of Fox's experience, and may in imagination walk in the rain with Woolman to Wyalusing; but the contribution of the Friends' Historical Society is to show the very complex background to these events. We see Lucretia Mott's insights against the opposition she met both as a woman and a political activist; we know more of the Moravian and the Indian circumstances at the time of Woolman's journey; we realise what Fox himself never mentioned, that Pendle Hill was and is a centre of witchcraft, that seventeenth-century curse. Sometimes our researches enrich, sometimes they modify the mythical quality of our favourite people and episodes, and sometimes (as with William Penn and his sword, which is certainly a central anecdote of Quaker observance) they force us to abandon historical validity without however denying mythical truth. But then, the little that John Punshon has to say *directly* about early Quaker history only reminds the present reviewer that we all see it differently: history is a construct rather than a record. Even personal history; John Punshon's fascinating account of his spiritual progress contains perhaps a shade more self-disparagement (from his Puritan background it may be) than the Recording Angel will allow, and a shade less

of the sense of Divine Sonship which got the Early Friends into so much trouble and brought them into spiritual as well as physical danger, but triumphantly liberated them from the burden of 'sin'.

Ormerod Greenwood

The English Baptists of the eighteenth century. By Raymond Brown. Baptist Historical Society (A History of English Baptists vol. 2) 1986. Pp. vii + 187 including index.

This deceptively concise, economically produced work contains a good deal of information and will be a standard reference on its subject. There are few specific references to Friends and its importance to Quaker historians will be to provide an up to date study of a parallel movement to offset some of the dangers of treating Quaker history in complete isolation from that of other denominations.

Friends may well need to be reminded that throughout the eighteenth century there were two distinct Baptist traditions, the General (Arminian) and the Particular (Calvinist). The General Baptists experienced problems with internal disagreements on their view of the person of Christ early in the century and the resulting division led to some becoming Unitarians. Like Friends, Baptists were subject to general hostility aimed at nonconformists which increased around the period of the American War of Independence because of their anti-establishment stance. Around 1715–18 there were about 19,000 General Baptists and 40,000 Particular Baptists, rather more in all than there were probably Friends then. The average Baptist congregation was probably about fifty.

There were some similarities to Friends as well as great differences. The attitude of the General Baptists to marrying out, their later social concern, opposition to the slave-trade and to gaming and problems about the plainness of lifestyles would all strike chords. Friends indeed drew some members away from the Arminian wing. While many General Baptist ministers were employed full-time in secular occupations it was though thought desirable to have a full-time paid ministry when this could be financed. Early in the century the Baptists did not sing hymns and there was opposition to set forms of prayer. These, like marrying out, were a source of concern to the Particular Baptists too. Other important themes are the competition with Methodism, the growth of evangelism and, less likely to be familiar to Friends, the clear and detailed discussion of the theological questions and differences that were so important in Baptist history.

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