

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

*The Quakers and the English Legal System.* By C.W. Horle. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.

The history of the persecution of Friends during the later seventeenth century has been well documented; the new ground broken by Craig Horle's important book is the examination of this continuous harassment in the context of the contemporary legal system, its administrators and procedures and the reaction of contemporaries, both Quakers and Anglicans.

The main problem stemmed from the failure of both the Crown and Parliament to provide a unified approach to the problems posed by religious dissent; lack of direction and a vacillating policy towards nonconformity made coherent implementation of the legal code by the judiciary impossible. Without co-operation between all the different echelons of society involved there was little danger that the rigours of the penal code would successfully stamp out nonconformity despite the fact that many Quaker beliefs and practices were bound to clash with both civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Refusal to pay tithes or attend divine service contravened long standing statutes and could not be ignored; travelling and opening shops on Sundays conflicted with law and custom and caused grave disquiet; insistence on plain speech and the northern origins of the movement – obscure to many southerners – created suspicion and led to assertions of vagrancy; refusal to swear led to a multitude of processes in statute law which proclaimed Friends' criminality. All these aspects of Friends' refusal to compromise are discussed in full with numerous examples culled from all over the country.

Transgression of laws which Friends believed to be wrong was a conscious decision; prosecution by procedures which left them in ignorance of the charge or even its existence was another matter and by the mid-1670s Friends were finally convinced that the best way to combat legal connivance was the adoption of legal tactics in their own defence. A fascinating story emerges of the opinions – not always correct – taken from lawyers sympathetic to dissenters and the development of tactics to minimize the effects of punitive procedures on individuals. Although not all Friends were prepared to undertake legal action in their own defence the establishment of Meeting for Sufferings in 1676 marked an important step towards a more professional response to persecution based on the experience of London Friends who were increasingly accustomed to lobbying the Crown, Parliament and the judiciary. In particular the introduction of delaying tactics meant that the prosecution of Quakers became a time-consuming and costly process with a decreasing chance of success.

Laws against nonconformists may have been harsh but the picture was not all black. It is made quite clear that many of the authorities who had the power to persecute and prosecute Friends turned a blind eye to transgressions or rendered positive assistance. Many instances were recorded by contemporaries of kindness and help proffered, whether by justices in refusing to allow the wilder excesses of some of the informers or in the more humble efforts of neighbours in replacing goods distrained from Friends' houses.

This detailed study of the most intense period of Quaker persecution throws valuable

light on the effects of weak kingship, the legal system, which was largely unable to cope, and the increasingly sophisticated defence systems established by the persecuted; it also emphasizes the fact that basic humanity was not far below the surface despite the severity of the legal code. Craig Horle has done historians a great favour in looking at the problems afresh and coming up with new insights.

*Helen Forde*

*Abiah Darby 1716–1793 of Coalbrookdale Wife of Abraham Darby II.* By Rachel Labouchere. W. Sessions, York, 1988. £10, paperback £5.

Abiah Darby was the second wife of the second Abraham Darby. She lived therefore at the centre of an important aspect of the Industrial Revolution in England at Coalbrookdale where she was hostess to many visitors when not pursuing her other vocation as a travelling minister among Friends. Rachel Labouchere has really written a more wide-ranging family history than her title implies since she has been able to draw extensively on other family papers including the journal of Abiah's daughter-in-law Deborah as well as her main source, Abiah's journal, now in the Library at Friends House. Rachel Labouchere provides a very detailed chronological recital of Darby family life with an emphasis on domestic events and Abiah's travels often in her subject's own words through some imaginative recreations of the eighteenth-century atmosphere which may paraphrase original sources. There are constant lists of the names of visitors and correspondents with many well-known names among them including those of a number of American Friends. While Abiah's journal may in part have followed the traditional pattern of eighteenth-century Friends' journals, as recounted here the strong domestic element and examples of the considerable range of contacts built up through generous hospitality help to give us a picture of life in a prosperous Quaker household that is very valuable even though the individual incidents may be of minor importance by themselves.

Hugh Barbour's brief introduction points out that women in the family, particularly Abiah and Deborah, were the strong religious characters. He stresses the religious aspects of Abiah's life though these do not emerge so clearly from the text that follows. A biographical supplement of 42 pages is very helpful in coping with the stream of names and compensates in part for the scanty footnotes and indications of sources. Today's readers might have welcomed a note on the significance of the Lisbon earthquake and an explanation that Abiah was interested in astronomy rather than in astrology as we now understand it. Two clearly set out family trees are also useful and remind us of the complexity of Quaker inter-relatedness as well as high infant mortality. However, more careful proofreading and editing with consistent citation of printed works and capitalisation could have made this a better book. The somewhat oversimplified glossary of Quaker terminology may help some readers who are not Friends though it is sad to see the business meeting described as 'a patient endeavour to find consensus'.

*David J. Hall*

*A History of the Adult School Movement.* By J. Wilhelm Rowntree and Henry Bryan Binns, with a new introduction and additional notes by Christopher Charlton. Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, 1985.

This reprint of a classic study of the Adult school movement, first published in 1903, has offered an opportunity to set it in context and provide additional – and copious – notes on the issues and personalities involved. In his Introduction Christopher Charlton rightly stresses the continuing validity of the analysis made by Rowntree and Binns and the importance of their influence in the development and expansion of the work of Friends.

With the benefit of 80 years of hindsight it is possible to begin to disentangle some of the emotive issues which lay behind the debates on the relationship between the Society and the adult education classes, the desirability, or otherwise, of destroying the unsectarian nature of the schools, the division in the Society about the wisdom of expanding the curriculum and the social side of the movement and the perceived threat of the PSA (Pleasant Sunday Afternoon) meetings. At the time it was not so easy, nor were the visionaries always distinguishable from the pragmatists. Rowntree and Binns' concept of the regeneration of the Society was with the development of personal responsibility and social duty and they were not to know that within the next 15 years society and the state would be subjected to drastic upheaval. Nor could they have foretold that the post-war generation of workers in the Adult education movement would find the maintenance of the school buildings, so proudly erected for social and educational purposes, an impossible burden. But their firm convictions about the need for debate and the importance of involvement of Friends is very clear.

To contemporaries, and in particular to Friends, the leading protagonists were well known; many of them held public office or were in the forefront of the work of the Society. The very full biographical notes on their attitudes and careers provided by Christopher Charlton are essential for those who may read this book now with an interest in education but without the contemporary background. Friends will also be grateful for a clear picture of the issues which were dominating the Society at the turn of the century. The Adult school history project has made a most useful start with this publication; if, in future, the publications could offer a slightly more professional format – a contents page, for instance, and a rather less confusing numbering of the pages – the directors would only gain the credit they undoubtedly deserve.

*Helen Forde*

*Talking Across the World: the love letters of Olaf Stapledon and Agnes Miller 1913–1919.* Edited by Robert Crossley. University Press of New England, USA & London, 1987.

Olaf Stapledon, science fantasy writer, philosopher and member of the Friends Ambulance Unit from 1914 to 1919, came from a non-Quaker Cheshire family, though related by marriage to the Barnard family, Friends of Reigate. Margaret Barnard emigrated to Australia in 1893. In 1913 her daughter Agnes came to England for a European holiday, spending some time with Olaf, a distant cousin. He fell in love with

her; but at the start of the first world war she sailed back to Sydney, remaining there until 1919, when she married him at Reigate Meeting House.

*Talking Across the World* consists of extracts from the hundreds of letters between them during their separation. Agnes's letters are glimpses into a privileged life; holidays and picnics punctuated by part-time war work. She writes to Olaf of the referenda of 1916 and 1917 (both of which rejected conscription), and elides together cowardice and the labour movement with some vehemence. We are given this lively, if politically contradictory, reaction to the 1917 Sydney tram strike: 'Perhaps I'll be driving a tram before the month is out! Russian women do things – it would be nice if we did things too'. Of the 1916 referendum on conscription: 'The Quakers stuck to their no. Mother is one of their black sheep...' Crossley perhaps overstates when he comments 'a renegade in Sydney Friends Meeting...' for neither Agnes nor her mother appear in Australian members' lists of this period, nor those for Reigate for that matter. Further Agnes's war work was on behalf of French soldiers, rather than for Sydney Friends' relief work. The unanimity of Australian Friends *vis-à-vis* the war, and political involvement generally, is more complex than Crossley infers. Australia General Meeting of 1915 admitted 'several of our members have joined the ranks of his Majesty's army...' and the next year the *Australian Friend* noted, of a speaker at an anti-conscription rally, that 'the strongest protests at our Friend's presence and action have come from members of his own meeting...'

Agnes empathized with Olaf's work, though she was uneasy at his pacifism; accepted that the pacifist viewpoint had little publicity in Australia, while herself supporting conscription. Her letters are vivacious above all, showing ebullience as well as the "devastating sanity" which Olaf was to salute in the preface to his *Last and First Men* (1937).

Olaf was not a Friend, but the letters show him a troubled man in 1914, for he would not fight. Four factors made possible his entry into the FAU. He was determined to perform paramedical work; his wealthy father provided an ambulance for the Unit; his Quaker aunt and Michael Graveson, prominent Liverpool Friend, sponsored his application.

At the same time Olaf wrote 'my not being a Friend shall not stand in the way'. He reluctantly accepts that the FAU are assisting the prosecution of the war, yet feels some shame at travelling on leave, in his Unit uniform. There is some account of the division in the FAU over the 1916 Military Service Acts, under which so many (Friends included) were to be imprisoned – 'for those who stay at home there is persecution, and I escape that under cover of khaki...' We have vivid letters written at his post (not "at the front": the French army did not permit civilian units there) and some written during infrequent home leaves. In the former, Olaf could not divulge military information, nor reveal much of the rancour within the FAU over conscription. He writes of '.. sons of strict quakers... far from strict quakers themselves' while at the same time writing affectionate cameos of a number of Friends in the Unit. The portraits and poems sketching Olaf and his comrades in *The Little Grey Book* (1920), and his own published account of his FAU work [in *We did not fight* (1935)] are fleshed out thanks to Crossley.

The edition informs us about the formative years of a strong, lifetime adult relationship; about three national cultures in wartime (Australia, England and France); about a significant episode of Quaker witness this century, from the viewpoint of a non-Friend participant, and of course about part of a major writer's life. The typography is pleasing, the illustrations evocative and the index well-constructed.

Josef Keith