

AN ABSENT PRESENCE:
QUAKER NARRATIVES OF JOURNEYS TO
AMERICA AND BARBADOS, 1671-81¹

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ABSTRACT

Through case studies of writings by George Fox, Alice Curwen and Joan Vokins, this article identifies a marked discrepancy in style and focus between early Quaker accounts of journeys to the American mainland and to Barbados. Accounts of the mainland journeys are detailed and often dramatic narratives which, like most early Quaker writing, read the spiritual in and from the places and people encountered, whilst those concerned with Barbados are brief, bland and apparently unconcerned with the immanence of God in the material and social world. An explanation for this discrepancy is sought in the particular cultural and social circumstances of Barbados, and in particular in the pressures on the Quaker habit of elision between the social and the spiritual brought to bear by the institution and practice of slavery.

KEYWORDS

Early Quakers; America; Barbados; slavery; Fox; travel narrative

From its inception, the Quaker travelling ministry was also a publishing ministry. In May 1652, when George Fox descended Pendle Hill after his founding vision of 'a great people' (Fox 1998: 83), his immediate response was to write a paper and see to its distribution. From this moment, the activities of travelling and writing went hand in hand, and Fox himself set the pace in both regards. As he travelled through 'the 1652 country' and beyond, he composed and dictated letters, tracts and notebooks, culminating in 'y^e great Journall of my Life, Sufferings, Travills and Imprisonments' (Fox 1911: II, 347).² Fox and his followers were 'Publishers of Truth' in both the broad and narrow senses of the term: they published by means of their restless journeying from place to place, embodying the truth of the workings of the Inward Light, but also by their production and distribution of printed text.³

Indicative, too, in Fox's account of his Pendle Hill experience was the elision of the physical landscape through which he was travelling with the spiritual contours of the environment to which he bore witness:

as we went I spied a great high hill called Pendle Hill and I went on the top of it with much ado it was so steep: but I was moved of the Lord to go atop of it: and when I came atop of it I saw Lancashire sea: and there atop of the hill I was moved to sound the day of the Lord and the Lord let me see atop of the hill in what places he had a great people (Fox 1998: 82-83).

Pendle Hill is a topographical feature of undoubted physical presence, whose steepness causes Fox 'much ado', but it is also a place of prominence in his spiritual landscape, ascended with difficulty but with godly assurance. There, precipitated by the hill's composite spiritual/material loftiness, his 'vision' of 'Lancashire sea' combined with a 'vision' of 'a great people' and the places in which they dwelt.⁴ The physical location of Fox's Pendle Hill vision was written into the terms of its articulation, and set the tone for the movement's habitual blending of a sense of place with spiritual commentary, as well as of journey and text.⁵ Indeed, Quaker theology and practice were grounded in a belief in the continuity between the spiritual, material and social. Just as the notion of the Inward Light turned on the in-dwelling of the divine in the human, and the shaping force of this godly Light on the body and behaviours of the believer, so this elision of the spiritual and the material extended beyond the body, to the places and spaces in which those bodies dwelt and moved.⁶

This interrelation between journey, text and socio-spiritual topography was both confirmed and complicated by the expansion of the movement into the English colonial plantations of the Caribbean and North America. In 1654 Quakerism moved south from its seedbeds in the north, establishing important urban bases in London and Bristol; in 1655, the first Quakers crossed the Atlantic, travelling to Barbados and to mainland America.⁷ From then on, hardly a year passed without English Friends making this journey, whether to effect conversions, to counter persecution, or to rally backsliders. Accounts of these journeys took several forms, principally narrative and epistolary, but also, on occasion, daily notebook entries. It is with the discrepancy between Friends' accounts of the mainland and the Barbadian parts of their journeys that this article is concerned – for, if the sheer number of accounts of such journeys is itself noteworthy, even more striking is the narratives' internal unevenness. Whilst Friends' accounts of their travels in mainland America reproduce the dynamic between journey, location and text outlined above, their narratives of their visits to Barbados, the largest and most important Caribbean Quaker community, are quite different. These are invariably much shorter, devoid of detail, and curiously 'unlocated', the socio-spiritual topography unarticulated, in a manner quite unlike the mainland texts.

To seek to understand and account for this persistent disparity, I shall focus on the narrative accounts produced by three public Friends who travelled from England to both Barbados and the American mainland in the latter part of the seventeenth century: the accounts of George Fox's visit of 1671-73, Alice Curwen's of 1675-77, and Joan Vokins' of 1680-81 (Fox 1911, 1952, 1998; Curwen 1680; Vokins 1691).

These accounts are chosen in part because they emanate from Friends positioned very differently within the movement: Fox was by the 1670s its undisputed leader, whilst Curwen and Vokins, although respected public Friends, did not have equivalent national or international profiles. Furthermore, while Fox's *Journal* is a unique document, in terms of its length, its detail, and the status of its author, Curwen's and Vokins' texts resemble many other contemporary Quaker publications, including their travel narratives in a composite commemoration of the life and sufferings of a recently deceased Friend, which comprised testimonies about, and letters to and from, the subject, as well as the narrative account itself. Despite the different genesis and status of the three texts, however, they have in common this marked disparity between the richly detailed narration of the mainland journeys, and the brief, imprecise, unlocated accounts of their island visits. This article will be concerned, first, with a close characterisation of these divergent narrative strategies, and, second, with seeking to account for them.

Fox was the first of the three to go to the Atlantic colonies, travelling out from England in 1671 with twelve other Friends. His account of this journey, which lasted from 1671 to 1673, has had to be pieced together from a number of sources, as Fox's most recent editor, Nigel Smith, enumerates:

Some parts of the account of Fox's travels in America (1671–3) survive in notebooks dictated by Fox on a day-to-day basis... Details of the outward journey from England to Barbados survive in the log of a fellow passenger, John Hull... An account of the latter part of the American journey (November 1672–June 1673), presumably drawing upon the earlier diaries, was inserted into the Spence Manuscript (Fox 1998: 456).

Smith includes the latter part of the American journey in his edition of the *Journal*, where it comprises nearly thirty pages, recording, amongst other things, encounters with Friends in Rhode Island, with Indians at Shelter Island, and with adverse terrain in 'the new country' of Jersey and in Maryland. Although the landscape it describes differs from that found in Fox's accounts of the 1652 country, the style and narrative referents are familiar:

and on the twenty-eighth day we passed about thirty miles in the new country, through the woods' very bad bogs, one worse than all, where we and our horses was fain to slither down a steep place, and let them to lie and breathe themselves, and they call this Purgatory; and so we came to Shrewsbury, and on the first-day of the week we had a precious meeting (Fox 1998: 461).

In a telling juxtaposition, 'Purgatory' and 'Shrewsbury' co-exist as landmarks in the still largely unmapped space through which Fox was travelling.⁸ One name delineates the physical terrain through the invocation of a Catholic spiritual hinterland made redundant by the starker binarisms of Reformed religion, while the other does so through the transplanting of a place-name from 'old' England. Fox's account also demonstrates the extent to which the land was demarcated through the annexation of native American names. Together, these practices show how the land was rendered intelligible through the planting of names which brought together the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the biblical/spiritual and the topographical.

The scriptural associations of Fox's journey are brought into focus by the descriptions of the landscape he is traversing, which consisted in almost biblical extremes, and required biblical levels of endurance from the travellers:

we passed over a desperate river of rocks and broad stones, very dangerous to us and our horses, and from thence we came to Christian River, and swam over our horses, and it was bad and miry... [A]nd the next day we passed all day, and saw neither house nor man through the woods, and swamps, and many cruel bogs and watery places, that we was wet to the knees most of us, and at night we took up our lodging in the woods, and made us a fire... [A]nd now they say we are a thousand miles from Boston southward, they say that have travelled it; all which we have travelled by land and down bays and over rivers and creeks and bogs and wildernesses (Fox 1998: 463, 469, 470).

As usual, Friends are represented in a structural relationship predicated on opposition and suffering. However, in the absence of the adversities more familiar to travelling Friends – the hostility of religious and civic opponents – water, rock, mud and forest instead constitute an elemental adversity, to be endured and overcome. It is the combination of this narrative of adversity with the extremity of the conditions and the continued invocation of place names of almost allegorical sonority, such as Christian River, which marks this out as a terrain as symbolic as, and of a piece with, the terrain of Pendle Hill and the 1652 country.

Fox journeys through a symbolic landscape that leads him into and out of the ever-present analogue of the Bible. As he moves south, from Rhode Island and Long Island into Jersey, Maryland, Virginia and Carolina, the narrative focus shifts from community to terrain. If the journey in the more established colonies of the north is recounted in the familiar Quaker terms of encounters with friend and foe, then the account of the less 'planted' southerly territories is, in part, a prospectus in which the nature of the terrain is set out, significant for its own sake (its shores, islands and woods harbour isolated pockets of Friends and sympathisers), for what it symbolised (endurance of, and godly delivery from, hardship) and even, perhaps, for what it promised. As this terrain was still only partially annexed to the colonial project, Frederick B. Tolles suggests that Fox might have been exploring this territory 'with a view to a Quaker colonising venture':

Within eight years the wilderness which Fox had twice traversed, the great middle region stretching from the mouth of the Hudson to the mouth of the Delaware, was in Quaker hands. Meanwhile, Rhode Island to the northeastward and North Carolina to the south had become, to all intents and purposes, Quaker colonies (Tolles 1960: 12).

The link between Fox's American journey and the subsequent establishing of Quaker colonies depends, as Tolles suggests, on only circumstantial evidence. There are, however, textual indications that Fox conceived of his journey as having a different significance from simply the encouragement of isolated Friends, one predicated on a particular analysis of the relation between traveller and landscape. In a postscript, Fox offers an interpretative gloss on his American travels:

The great Lord God of Heaven and earth, and creator of all who is over all, carried us by his high hand and mighty power and wisdom over all and through many dangers and perils by sea and land, and perils by deceitful professors without possession, who

was as the raving waves of the sea, but made a calm, and perils of wolves, bears, tigers and lions, and perils of rattlesnakes and other venomous creatures of like poisonous nature, and perils through great swamps and bogs and wilderness... [A]nd the Lord God made all easy by his spirit and power, and gave his people dominion over all, and made all plain and low as a meadow... (Fox 1998: 487-88).

The perils of the journey reside in an undifferentiated mix of hostile landscape, 'deceitful professors', and ravening creatures. These are 'made easy' by God's power, who 'gave his people dominion over all'. The reference here is to Genesis and the settlement of the newly created earth itself: 'God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth' (Gen. 1:26). This comparison renders Fox's journey on the American mainland a more explicitly appropriative one, concerned to consolidate Friends' communities, but the invocation of the foundational and biblically sanctioned process of gaining 'dominion' undertaken by the unfallen Adam, still living in the image of God, also brings with it associations of a prelapsarian colonial venture, still untainted by sin, where the sovereignty of the incomer can be claimed as both proper and inevitable. Fox does not represent his American landscape as prelapsarian – he is all too obviously 'travailing' in a fallen world of obstacles and opposition; nonetheless, the word 'dominion' suggests an underlying resonance between his own narrative and the account in Genesis.⁹

Fox's narrative establishes itself as an account of a spiritual journey in part by recording the material details of the daily experiences of the traveller. These accumulate a significance beyond that of mere personal hardship, and become part of the defining and foundational grand narrative of Quaker 'sufferings for the truth's sake', and it is this narrative that is also rehearsed in other Friends' accounts of journeys on the American mainland.¹⁰ The Lancashire Friend Alice Curwen, with her husband Thomas, undertook her journey two years after Fox's return, in 1675–77. Her account is much shorter: just five-and-a-half pages cover her call to travel, her journeys in mainland America and Barbados, and her return to England. But within those few pages, the text offers a level of descriptive detail about the places, people and events she encountered that are reminiscent of what Mary Louise Pratt, in her study of colonial writing, calls 'survival literature': travel narrative that supplied English readers with 'first-person stories of shipwrecks, castaways, mutinies, abandonments, and (the special inland version) captivities' (Pratt 1992: 86). Such narratives focus on the fascinating detail and omnipresent dangers of this other place, dangers arising from native inhabitants, landscape and climate alike, all framed and contained by the home that is first left and then returned to. In Curwen's account, the Quaker colony of Rhode Island is in turmoil as she arrives, with people 'in an Uproar, Killing, and Burning, and Murdering, and great Distress was upon the People's Minds' (Curwen 1680: 3). She hears of 'a new Law that was made at *Boston* against the People of God called *Quakers*... And then it opened in us in the Springs of Life, *That We must travail thither, and break in upon their new Law*' (Curwen 1680: 4, original emphasis):

So we traivailed through the Woods and Places where the devouring *Indians* had made great Desolation in many Places, but the Lord preserved us... [A]nd [we] came to a Friend's House beyond the River, where there were about two hundred people (some Friends, and others) who were come thither for Safety, and had fortified the House very strongly about for fear of these Bloody *Indians*, which had killed two of our Friends within three miles of that place; ...[A]nd so [we] came to *Boston* again, where being in our Meeting, their Law being now published, the Constable with others came forcibly and drave us out of our Meeting all along the Street, until they came to the Prison, or *House of Correction*, whereinto they thrust us... [A]nd the third day of our Imprisonment they brought us down to the Whipping-Post, but the Presence of the Lord was manifested there, which gave us Dominion over all their Cruelty, and we could not but Magnifie the Name of the Lord, and declare of his Wonderful Work at that time, at which the *Heathen* were astonished, and shook their Heads: And the next day we were set at Liberty (Curwen 1680: 4-5).

Like many other Quaker accounts of sufferings, this is not without drama and suspense. Adversity is embodied in the landscape; threat is present in the possibility of attack from 'the Bloody *Indians*' as well as in Boston's anti-Quaker law; setbacks and suspense are provided by imprisonment, pathos by the whipping post, and confirmation of Quaker rectitude by their ultimate deliverance. Sufferings here are the route to 'Dominion', just as they had been for Fox: his, over terrain; hers, over adversaries. If Fox's account is notable for its investment in the texture and signifying capacity of an elemental landscape, Curwen's is striking for its dense compaction of the textual referents, the captures, sufferings, setbacks and vindications, of secular 'survival literature'.

Joan Vokins' account of her travels on the American mainland has, in its focus on opposition, much in common with Curwen's. As a 'nursing mother in Israel', her work was to re-gather those errant Friends whose backslidings were threatening to erode the Society. She recounts her disputes with Ranters, when, despite great weakness of body:

the God of Wisdom, Life and Power, filled me with the Word of his Power, and I stood up in the strength thereof, and it was so prevailing over the Meeting, that *Friends* were very much comforted and refreshed, and the Power of Darkness so chained, that the opposing *Ranters* and *Apostates* could not shew their antick tricks... [In Rhode Island, when] I came to the General Meeting of *Friends*, there was that abominable Crew, and *Tho. Case*, the grand *Ranter*, was bawling very loud; and I had been there but a very little time, but God's living Power did arise most wonderfully, and I declared in the demonstration thereof, and soon put him to silence (Vokins 1691: 34-35).¹¹

Through a series of challenges and confrontations, the narrative turns on the repeated re-enactment of St Paul's assertion that the weak will confound the mighty (1 Cor 1:27-28); the emphasis is on Vokins' physical weakness and on its inverse, her spiritual resilience and capacity to 'tender' Friends.

These mainland American journeys rehearse the familiar Quaker narrative of struggles and sufferings endured in a terrain which, for all its distance from the uplands of Westmorland, the marketplace of Carlisle or the streets of Bristol, could still be plotted between the well-established polarities of oppression and deliverance,

resolution and inconstancy, godly Light and carnal darkness. Quaker travellers showed an unerring capacity to seek out instances of opposition, hostility, or oppression – whether human or elemental – which would allow them to endure, suffer and, on occasion, resist and overcome. Alice Curwen's call to travel to Boston came, after all, as she heard of the execution of four Friends there in 1660 (Curwen 1680: 2).¹² As she saw it, and she was clearly not alone in this, there was a strong inverse relation between opposition to Friends and the successful transmission of the Word: 'the more the Enemy seeks to hinder the increase of Truth, the more it spreads' (Curwen 1680: 12). Such assertions reaffirm these Quaker journeys through the colonies of mainland America as framed through a sense of the inevitability of divine purpose, a sense habitually honed through opposition.

The image of the land constituted through the narration of these journeys is at once familiar and newly invigorated, the contrasts between its constitutive elements sharply defined. Its distinctive contours derive from the woods, rivers and towns, but also from the people inhabiting them: the networks of Friends, whether gathered in their own communities in Rhode Island and Jersey, or isolated individuals and small groups in the woods and villages along the rivers of Maryland; but also those identified as enemies of the Light – the Boston law-makers, the 'Bloody Indians', 'Tho. Case, the grand Ranter'. Perhaps the urgency of the religious struggle, the sense of millenarian flux and possibility that characterised the years of the movement's origins in the 1650s, were renewed in later years through its establishment in an environment which, for all its geographical distance, approximated more closely to the social and religious climate of the revolutionary period; perhaps the Puritanism of Massachusetts was a more satisfactory adversary than the one to be found in Restoration London. The gap between the new environment and the old was closed through the retelling of a familiar narrative in a new location, a narrative increasingly intended to fortify existing Friends rather than convince new ones – and fortification might be encouraged by a reanimation of the more elemental struggles of the years of the movement's inception.

It is this sense of elemental struggle which evaporates when the scene of these narratives shifts from the mainland to Barbados. Where Friends' accounts of their mainland travels are vigorous, detailed and comprehensive records of journeys taken, disputes entered, landscapes interpreted and sufferings endured, the Barbados narratives comprise a frustratingly unilluminating set of bland and superficial accounts. This is from Fox's account of his time in Barbados:

we came to Barbados the third day of the eighth month [Oct.], where we had many great meetings among the whites and blacks. And there was some opposition by the priests and Papists but the power of the Lord and his glorious Truth was over all and reached most in the island. And we stayed above a quarter of a year there and I went to visit the governor and he was loving to me; and a few days before I passed from the island the governor with many more came to see me to Thomas Rous's house. *And many persons of quality were convinced...* And we set up meetings in families in every Friend's house, among the blacks, some 200, some 300, in their houses that the masters and dames of families might admonish their families of blacks and whites, as Abraham did, which is a great service (Fox 1952: 609-10).¹³

In all, some two hundred and fifty words recount a visit of three months to a place whose natural, cultural and social environment struck other English visitors as radically strange: fascinating and appealing, but also brutal and dangerous. Moreover, we know that Fox's journey and visit were not uneventful: he was at first unwell, and then much troubled by the island's 'filth, dirt and unrighteousness, which lie as a heavy load and weight upon his spirit, so as it pressed down the spirit of God in him as a cart with sheaves' (Fox 1952: 596).¹⁴ Yet no further details of Fox's spiritual exercises follow, nor descriptions of the environment in which he and his companions found themselves. Neither the island's forests, plantations or towns, nor its social formation provided the usual grist to Fox's relentlessly textualising mill. Early Friends typically inhabited a dimension that elided the material and spiritual, such that aspects of the former were legible as signs of God's truth, the latter immanent within the social and natural environment. Here, instead, Fox records the social signs of Friends' successes: a sympathetic governor, the 'convincement' of 'persons of quality', the establishment of new Meetings. The contrast with the mainland narrative lies in the curious worldliness of this emphasis: here, the social *stands in for* the spiritual. The invocation of the convincement of persons of quality and the size of the Meetings, signs of a social success to which Friends are usually either indifferent or contemptuous, are made to gesture towards the existence of the spiritual, elsewhere, without ever reaching towards revealing its immanence, and never allowing the reader to glimpse its substance. The result is a flat, unidimensional and oddly unlocated record.

Fox returns to his impressions of Barbados in a postscript following the conclusion of the narrative proper. This comprises notable events omitted from the foregoing account, and includes reference to a dispute in Barbados between Fox and 'the priest and the justice':

the Baptists began first and they bawled and railed till one of them foamed at the mouth... [A]nd they asked me whether I had the same spirit as the Apostles had, and I said I had... [O]ne of these disturbers his name is Pearson of Barbados, a wicked man which had two wives, as they said, who railed against me in the meeting... [A]fterwards we had a good meeting and the power of the Lord and his blessed seed was set over all, blessed be his holy name for ever (Fox 1998: 486-87).

Here, finally, is an account to compare with those of the mainland journey; there is reference to specific people and events, irrational and passionate opposition, resolute adherence to truth, and just and blessed rewards. Yet this appears only as a postscript, recalled as part of a chain of recollections that link Indians to hostile English settlers to Fox himself. Such detail, however, exists not as part of the contemporaneous record, but only finds expression as part of a passage of post-hoc reminiscence of anecdotes of sympathy and opposition. This marginal positioning serves further to underline the sense of the Barbados section as excised of the characteristic detail of the Quaker travel narrative.

Curwen's account of her visit to Barbados, like Fox's, follows the account of her mainland journey. It too effects a striking reversal of narrative style, offering none of the drama or suspense of the foregoing account:

in Five Weeks and Two Dayes we came to *Barbadoes*. And the next day after we came ashore was their Quarterly-Meeting, where our Testimony was gladly received; and we travailed in that Island about Seven Moneths, where we had good Service both amongst Whites and Blacks; and the Lord added unto our Talent another Talent more; Everlasting Praises (saith our Souls in secret) unto his most holy Name, who hath given us good Success, and is adding unto his Church such as shall be saved in every Nation; for many did gather unto our Meetings... And when we were clear in our Spirits of this Island...we took Shipping, and came for *London* (Curwen 1680: 6-7).

The Curwens' decision to journey from Rhode Island to Boston had been prompted by news of a harsh new anti-Quaker law, and the tension between the inevitability and the deferral of anticipated conflict generates the mainland narrative's drama and energy. These qualities are strikingly absent from the Barbados narrative but, equally strikingly, could have been generated in the same manner – for in 1676, the year the Curwens travelled there, Barbados passed its own anti-Quaker law, prohibiting Friends from including slaves in their Meetings.¹⁵ This law was in response to the island's brutally pre-empted slave uprising of 1675, which had resulted in the execution of seventeen slaves, 'Six burnt alive, and Eleven beheaded, their dead bodies being dragged through the Streets, at *Spikes* a pleasant Port-Town in that Island, and were afterwards burnt with those that were burned alive' (Anon. 1676: 12). Whilst the Curwens' decision to travel to Boston had been explicitly related to the new anti-Quaker law, the Barbadian events and the resulting law played no part in the narrative trajectory; we learn only that Curwen was reluctant to go, 'fearing lest they should even trample upon my little Testimony', whilst her 'Husband [had] much upon him to *Barbadoes*' (Curwen 1680: 6). On arrival, however, as in Fox's account, we are assured of the visitors' 'success', their 'good Service both amongst Whites and Blacks'. The latter was clearly in defiance of the law passed on 21 April 1676, but there is nothing in Curwen's account to indicate this.

Vokins travelled to Barbados in 1681 (the year of a further anti-Quaker law), and spent between two and four months there.¹⁶ Her account, like Curwen's, is a brief reckoning of Meetings attended:

And when I arrived, I met with many Friends in *Bridg-Town*, and there took an account of the Monthly Meetings, and went to them and other Meetings as brief as I could; and most Days I had two or three Meetings of a Day, both among the Blacks, and also among the White People: And the Power of the Lord Jesus was mightily manifested, so that my Soul was often melted therewith, even in the Meetings of the *Negro's* or *Blacks*, as well as among Friends. And when I had gone through the Island, and was clear, having been well refreshed with Friends, in the feeling of the Heavenly Power; and in the strength of the same I came aboard the Ship for my Native Land again (Vokins 1691: 42-43).

Although the emphasis here is less on the success of Meetings in convincing others, and more on the impact of the Meetings on Vokins' own spirit, nevertheless the coordinates between which the narrative is constructed are recognisable from those in Fox's and Curwen's accounts: arrival; Meetings; the presence of both blacks and whites; Friends' support; God's power; departure.

In each case, the account of the Barbados visit offers significantly – in Fox's case, dramatically – less detail than is found concerning the writer's visit to the American mainland. In comparison with the mainland narratives, their elliptical character constitutes them as an absent presence within the longer accounts: nominally present, but so vague and undeveloped as almost to render them a textual absence. There are a number of aspects of this brevity that give pause. Why, when other stages of the journey are recorded in such detail, did this not warrant more narrative space or detail? Why, given Quakers' propensity for reading their environments symbolically, are there no emblematic readings of context and incident, either as evidence of Quaker success or of Quaker sufferings? What relation might there be between this terseness and tensions between Barbadian culture and the early Friends? To address these questions, it is necessary first to step back and review the colonial relationship between England and Barbados, and the place of Quakers within this.

'THE NURSERY OF TRUTH':
THE QUAKER PRESENCE IN BARBADOS

Barbados was England's first Caribbean colony, established in 1627 with the aim of reproducing Spain's lucrative colonial successes in the region.¹⁷ Not until the transition from tobacco to sugar cultivation was made in the 1640s and 1650s, and with it the transition from indentured white servants to slave labour, did the colony begin to bring in profits. By this point Barbados had acquired a double-edged reputation as a place where fortunes could be made, but with the most brutal servitude in English America. Historians have noted that 'Most seventeenth-century traders who stopped at Barbados were immediately struck by the unusual acquisitiveness of the people, a trait that seemed to know no moral boundary' (Puckrein 1984: 12), and suggest that the European colonists were drawn to the Caribbean colonies because they promised 'far more in the way of glamor, excitement, quick profit, and constant peril than the prosaic settlements along the North American coast' (Dunn 1972: 10). Contemporary accounts confirm the perception that this was a society organised exclusively around the acquisition of wealth. Richard Ligon, who visited Barbados from 1647 to 1650, suggested approvingly that 'they that have industry...may make it [i.e. Barbados] the Ladder to clyme to a high degree, of Wealth and opulencie, in this sweet Negotiation of Sugar' (Ligon 1657: 108). Father Antoine Biet, a French priest who visited Barbados in 1654, was less laudatory:

In speaking of morals, extravagance is very great among the English in these parts. They came here in order to become wealthy... The greatest of all the vices which prevail in this country is lewdness. It is a horrible thing to think about: adulterers, incest and all the rest. I will not say anymore on this (Handler 1967: 67-68).

Henry Whistler, in Barbados in 1655, was more succinct in his verdict, calling the island 'the dunghill whereon England doth cast forth its rubbish' (Dunn 1972: 77). Quaker commentators, unsurprisingly, were similarly condemnatory. The early

convert John Rous opened his 1656 pamphlet with the words, 'O Barbadoes, Barbadoes! who excels in wickednesse, pride and covetousness, oppressing, cheating and cozening' (Rous 1656: 1); and, fifteen years later, Fox condemned the 'debauch'd Language and Hellish Lyes' he encountered there: 'Truly I could not but wonder, and stand amazed, to hear of such foul, beastly and unmannerly, and uncivil Language, as I have heard since I came here' (Fox 1672: 6, 9).

The first Quakers to travel to Barbados stopped there en route to Boston, in 1655. Since the usual trade route to New England involved stopping off in Barbados, it became customary for English Friends to follow this itinerary and visit Barbados as a part of their travels to America.¹⁸ A steady stream of Quakers evangelised the island, particularly in the 1650s and 1660s, when there was broad religious toleration there: Father Biet commented that 'All are given freedom of belief, provided that they do nothing to be conspicuous in public' (Handler 1967: 69). The visits continued through subsequent years, if more sporadically, into the 1690s, such that Tolles concludes that 'there was scarcely a time during the second half of the seventeenth century when one or more Friends from the British Isles were not traveling in some part of the American colonial world' (Tolles 1960: 28).¹⁹ Quakerism quickly became well established in Barbados, and visiting Friends always reported a receptiveness to their message, and further convincements.²⁰ The Quaker commitment to 'convincement' seems to have extended to the choice of locations for their meeting houses: one report was critical of the siting of these, observing that 'with all their seeming humility, [they are placed] by the sides of the most populous roads in the country, eventually with a view of Proselytism' (Durham 1972: 15).

By 1670, there were six Quaker Meetings established on Barbados, and the community had considerable numerical presence, Shilstone suggesting that at one point there were over 1200 Friends: about six per cent of a white population of around 20,000 (Shilstone 1971: 43).²¹ Meetings were sizeable. Levy suggests that from three to four hundred people gathered to listen to Fox at each Meeting, and William Edmundson recalls that some three thousand people came to hear his public debate with a parish priest from Bridgetown in 1675 (Levy 1960: 300, 301; Edmundson 1829: 76). The community was not without wealth, status or influence: in one seven-year period, Friends' sufferings brought them losses of £11,805 (Durham 1972: 25). Some Quakers were prosperous plantation owners and slave owners – a point to which I shall return – but others were drawn from the lower ranks of island society: Besse's lists show that, in 1674–78, Barbadian Friends included not only a former JP and a former member of the Council, but also shopkeepers, widows, surgeons, and several designated only by the words 'a poor man' (Besse 1753: II, 314–18). Beckles notes that the social differentiation of Barbadian Quakers was inscribed in their geographical locations: in the parish of St Philip, where the land was of low value, there were a large number of poor white communities, comprising mainly marginalised Irish Catholics and Quakers (Beckles 1989: 130).

This was the place described as 'the nursery of truth' by the English Friend George Rofe when he visited the island in 1661 (Jones 1966: 41). Fox, Curwen and Vokins found a Quaker community that was by no means small, uniformly impoverished or

embattled – no more so, at any rate, than that in England. Barbadian Friends were substantial in number, drawn from across the social ranks of the colony, and of sufficient wealth and influence to cause real concern amongst the ruling classes of the island, such that there were five Acts passed specifically against them (in 1676, two in 1678, 1681 and 1723) (Durham 1972: 22).²² Visiting Friends found enthusiastic and sizeable Meetings, eager to hear them speak. As well as finding hostility caused by resident Friends' refusal to take oaths or to serve in the island militia, and nervousness about the inclusion of slaves in their Meetings, they also found a number of sympathetic 'persons of quality'. There must have been a peculiar intensity to this small island community, contained within an area of 166 square miles (roughly the area of the Isle of Wight) (Bridenbaugh 1972: 19), with a reputation for greed, brutality and, by the 1670s, legislative hostility to Friends, coupled with a dynamic network of Meetings. It was perhaps this familiar combination of lively communities of Friends together with vociferous opposition that prompted Rofe to designate the island as he did; perhaps 'the Lamb's War' could more readily be seen to be fought there than in the new social configurations of Restoration England.

Whatever lay behind Rofe's phrase, the island could not have been seen by Fox, Curwen and Vokins as straightforwardly fostering Quaker 'truth', for this was a community that had accommodated controversial, even divisive, Quaker figures. Following the 'hat controversy' of 1661, John Perrot had gone into voluntary exile on Barbados, where he was warmly welcomed by Friends, but from where he was still seen to be a pernicious influence on the wider movement.²³ The English Friend William Salt visited him, and was reported in 1665 to be 'a bad spirit and creeper in darkness', spreading Perrot's papers abroad; another Friend wrote to Fox from Barbados in 1664 that Friends here 'are not like the people they were... [T]ruly they are full of confusion... [T]his people will hear nothing against Perrot' (Braithwaite 1961: 237, 239). Robert Rich, a loyal defender of James Nayler and a friend of Perrot, also made his home on Barbados; thereafter, 'whenever fresh divisions arose, as with John Perrot or with Wilkinson and Story, Rich had stood with the disaffected' (Nuttall 1965: 530–31).²⁴ In the course of the Wilkinson–Story controversy, in the second half of the 1670s, Rich circulated the papers of disaffected English Friends, and in 1680 Barbadian Friends themselves subscribed to a paper that, to Fox, seemed dangerously divisive and weakening of the spirit of unity (Braithwaite 1961: 348, 349). English Friends visited Barbados, then, not as ambassadors from or to united communities, but as negotiators for a still-contested Quaker mainstream. Indeed, Ingle suggests that Fox visited with the express intent of instigating a system of men's and women's meetings, as he had at home, and of thereby eradicating remaining pockets of Perrot's followers: 'Exercising discipline, these new meetings would see that Friends avoided such disorderly practices as permitting men to wear hats when they prayed' (Ingle 1994: 234). Curwen was in Barbados when Rich was still alive and the Story–Wilkinson controversy still at issue; and Vokins arrived in the aftermath of the publication of the controversial Barbadian paper. Barbados Friends were implicated in all the disputations to be found at home, and part of the agenda of visiting Friends was to speak against internal dissent and 'backsliding'. All the elements which typically figured in Friends' narratives of their

travels seem; therefore, to have been in place: a culture of buoyant Meetings, some voices of internal dissent, and vigorous external opposition or persecution.

THE UNWRITTEN TESTIMONY:
ENGLISH FRIENDS AND BARBADIAN SLAVERY

[T]he many thousand Englishmen who inhabited Barbados, Jamaica, and the Leewards during the seventeenth century rarely bothered to write descriptions of what they saw or did... None of the islands boasted a printing press, nor did the islanders use the London presses...

The islanders were men of action, not reflection. They lacked the driving moral purpose and intellectual commitment of the New England Puritans (Dunn 1972: 23-24).

Perhaps, as Dunn suggests here, the lack of a 'driving moral purpose' accounts for there being so few written accounts by the Caribbean colonists of their environment and activities. After all, Barbados was unlike the New England colonies in that it was no 'holy experiment', no attempt to embody the Puritan vision of a 'city on the hill'; it was instead a wholly material dream that drove the colonists there (Puckrein 1984: 104). A sense of moral purpose *was*, however, one of the defining characteristics of the early Quaker missionaries, and something that drove not only their itinerant mission but also their ceaseless production and circulation of writing. Yet this sense of purpose – the need to encourage Friends or warn against dissent – was insufficient to prompt Friends to produce narratives of their Barbadian visits of the length and complexity of their usual accounts of their travels. Is it possible to identify anything in what these Quaker writers *do* say about their perceptions of Barbados to make sense of their uncharacteristic recourse to generalised and superficial glosses of their visits?

The one feature of Barbadian society that each writer notes, albeit elliptically, is the one that non-Quaker commentators find worthy of most comment: namely, the institution and practice of slavery. George Gardyner, utilitarian as always, makes only a passing comment, but one that both summarises and glosses over the distinction between white and black people: Barbados, he writes, is 'thoroughly inhabited with English, and Negroes their servants' (Gardyner 1651: 77). In contrast, both Henry Whistler and Father Biet suggest a sense of the affective impact of witnessing the commodification and mistreatment of slaves. Whistler suggested that 'Our English here doth think a Negro child the first day it is born to be worth £5... They sell them from one to the other as we do sheep' (Dunn 1972: 77), while Biet wrote that:

They treat their slaves with a great deal of severity... [T]hey are beaten to excess, sometimes up to the point of applying a fire-brand all over their bodies which makes them shriek with despair. I saw a poor Negro woman, perhaps thirty-five or forty years old, whose body was full of scars which she claimed had been caused by her master's having applied the fire-brand to her: this horrified me (Handler 1967: 66-67).

Richard Ligon's account indicates the complexity of his encounter with slavery:

Though there be a marke set upon these people, which will hardly ever be wip'd off, as of their cruelties when they have advantages, and of their fearfulness and falsnesse; yet no rule so generall but hath his acception: for I beleive, and I have strong motives to cause me to bee of that perswasion, that there are as honest, faithfull, and conscionable people amongst them, as amongst those of *Europe*, or any other part of the world (Ligon 1657: 53).

In some ways, Ligon effects a familiar act of 'othering', whereby undesirable characteristics (cruelty, fearfulness, falseness) are located with the category of the Other, while those seen as laudable (honesty, faithfulness, conscience) are seen as belonging more properly with Europeans. Nonetheless, the comment pivots on the phrase 'yet no rule so generall but hath his acception', signalling the impossibility of maintaining this distinction, undercutting any sense of an essential difference between the two ethnic groups, and concluding with the familiar humanist recourse to the notion that people are people the world over. Ligon's words suggest a struggle between a number of incompatible psychic responses to, and investments in, the institution to which he is witness.

The three Quaker narratives offer nothing comparable to Ligon's complex and affective commentary, restricting themselves to passing references to slaves' attendance at Friends' Meetings. Each notes, in remarkably similar words, that they 'had good Service both amongst Whites and Blacks'; but only Vokins offers a glimpse of her perception of the ideology of slavery, writing that 'the Power of the Lord Jesus was mightily manifested, so that my Soul was often melted therewith, even in the Meetings of the *Negro's* or *Blacks*, as well as among Friends' (Vokins 1691: 43). The word 'even' separates slaves as a category from others at the Meeting; paradoxically, their presence does not make them Friends, but renders them distinct from them. As Susan Wiseman has noted, this kind of textual move constitutes slaves as a social category different from those usually deployed in Quaker writing, by placing them outside the usual broad binary of 'Friend', walking in the Light, and non-Quaker, walking in darkness. Wiseman suggests that slaves (and native Americans) are important as 'marginal counters' in Quaker 'debates over religious and political authority', emerging in these narratives at 'points of dispute between systems of authority'. She summarises this textual relation as 'the incorporation of slaves and Indians into a dynamic and tripartite struggle in Quaker discourse in which the benevolence of Quakers signifies in contrast to the barbarism of other Europeans, especially Puritans' (Wiseman 1998: 164). Although we might detect this deployment of slaves as 'marginal counters' in Vokins' text, it is difficult not to conclude that they are underplayed by a movement which, as Knott suggests, had an 'instinct for pathos' (Knott 1995: 131). There is no attempt to invoke these 'marginal counters' to critique Barbadian colonial society in the way that native Americans figure in other Quaker narratives, including those of Fox and Curwen, to demonstrate either (through contrast) the cruelty and ungodliness of the Puritan authorities, or else the wonderful deliverance of Friends from 'the Bloody *Indians*'. No such polemical moves are made with slaves; on the contrary, Wiseman cites a Quaker text in which slaves are compared with poor whites in order to elevate the whites and demote the status of the slaves (Wiseman 1998: 166-67).

Wiseman's concept of the 'marginal counter' illuminates another textual moment, in a letter from Alice Curwen to a Barbados widow, Martha Tavernor, 'that had *Negro's* to her Servants, who were convinced of God's Eternal Truth' (Curwen 1680: 18), but who would not let them attend Meetings:

And as for thy Servants, whom thou callst thy *Slaves*, I tell thee plainly, thou hast no right to reign over their Conscience in Matters of Worship of the Living God; for thou thy self confessedst, that *they had Souls to Save as well as we*: Therefore, for time to come let them have Liberty, lest thou be called to give an Account to God for them, as well as for thy self...; for I am perswaded, that if they whom thou call'st thy *Slaves*, be upright-hearted to God, the Lord God Almighty will set them Free in a way that thou knowest not; for there is none set free but in Christ Jesus, for all other Freedom will prove but a bondage (Curwen 1680: 18; original emphasis).

The 'Liberty' that Tavernor is urged to grant them is a restricted one – liberty to attend Meetings; any extension of this to a more general sense of liberty is circumvented by reference to the greater freedom to be had in Christ, which obviates all other liberties, 'for all other Freedom will prove but a bondage'. Curwen's argument is predicated on a sense of the spiritual equality of slaves (a recognition that they too have souls to save), but these souls are invoked to make an argument about the saving of *Tavernor's* soul, and buttressed through reference to something approaching a threat, as Curwen suggests that Tavernor's own salvation might be compromised if she fails to allow slaves to attend Meetings: 'let them have Liberty, lest thou be called to give an Account to God for them'. Despite the recognition that slaves have souls to save, these 'marginal counters' are used to make a point about the spiritual standing of a Friend. The souls of the slaves here literally become 'counters' – a means to tally up Tavernor's own 'account' with God. This recalls Curwen's narrative account, cited earlier:

we had good Service both amongst Whites and Blacks; and the Lord added unto our Talent another Talent more; Everlasting Praises (saith our Souls in secret) unto his most holy Name, who hath given us good Success, and is adding unto his Church such as shall be saved in every Nation (Curwen 1680: 6).

Here too the emphasis is on accumulation, first through the invocation of the parable of the talents (Mt. 25.14–30), and then in the reference to the 'adding' of the souls of the saved to the Church. The souls of the slaves function here in a manner disturbingly similar to the way in which the bodies of the slaves figure in the sugar economy: that is, as a means of producing surplus value (both spiritual and financial) for their masters. The transition to a slave-based economy in place of one based on white indentured servitude is seen by historians as combining with the transition from tobacco to sugar to explain the steep rise in the success of the Barbadian economy, and thereby the wealth of the planters, both Quaker and non-Quaker. In economic terms, the conditions under which slaves were transported, bought and kept allowed for high levels of 'surplus value': that is, the 'value remaining when the cost of maintaining the worker – his subsistence costs – has been subtracted from the total value of the product he produces' (Bullock and Trombley 1999: 847). 'The labour-power which the worker expends beyond the labour necessary for his

maintenance creates no value *for him*', but exists as pure profit by, in this case, the slave-owner; surplus value thus had for the capitalist, Marx suggested, 'all the charm of a creation out of nothing' (Fischer 1970: 104). It is possible, however, to chart a parallel course regarding the spiritual 'value' of the slaves: the saving of the slaves' souls produces 'value' for themselves (for '*they had Souls to Save as well as we*'), but also, 'surplus' to this, and here more prominently, value for their masters. However ambiguously, it is possible to discern a kind of Quaker spiritual capitalism running alongside, and dependent upon, the slave economy of Barbados, comprising both the accumulation of souls and the acquisition of spiritual 'surplus value' for the Quaker slave-owners, and intersecting in the significance of 'saving' in both the spiritual and the economic senses.²⁵

How, though, might the invocation of slaves as 'counters' within this discourse of spiritual capitalism relate to the lack of narrative engagement, with slavery or with Barbadian society more generally, that characterises these texts? This was clearly not the outcome of Friends' indifference to the ethical dimension of slavery, or of slaves' relationship to their masters' religion. Most Barbadian planters were, in the early decades of slavery on the island, averse to the conversion of slaves to Christianity, since the orthodoxy was still that this would require their manumission, since it was forbidden for one Christian to enslave another (Puckrein 1984: 81).²⁶ Fox countered this theological position from the outset, 'wrestling', as Kenneth L. Carroll put it, 'with the institution of slavery and...Quaker responsibilities towards Blacks and Indians who were slaves' (Carroll 1997: 21). In his 1657 letter 'To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves', Fox reminded Friends that 'the gospel is preached to every creature under heaven; which is the power that giveth liberty and freedom, and is glad tidings to every captivated creature under the whole heavens' (Fox 1848: 63). The implication, as in Curwen's letter to Martha Tavernor, is that slavery was one amongst many kinds of captivity, no more and no less real than that experienced by those living in thrall to sin. Rather than seeing slaves' captivity as situating them in a distinct social category, Fox instead takes it to underline their common humanity with other 'captivated creature[s]' and to confirm them as fit hearers of the gospel. The liberty afforded slaves by the gospel thus did not need to be distinguished from that offered to anyone else turning to the Light. This resulted in a position that was at once more radically inclusive of black slaves than that held by orthodox Christians – '*they had Souls to Save as well as we*' – but also more willing to reconcile Christianity and slavery. As Ingle points out, 'Fox's thinking reflected a maturing of the slave culture and acceptance of a new view that no contradiction existed between Christianity and slavery. Hence Christians might hold slaves, at least for the time being – and that time always retreating into an indefinite tomorrow – so that Christians might legitimately be enslaved by others of their faith' (Ingle 1994: 235).

As the title to Fox's 1657 letter makes explicit, Friends were directly implicated in these questions, for slave-owners included Friends amongst their number. Dunn identified the property holdings of 58 Barbadian Quakers in 1680, from all walks of society (planters large and small, merchants, craftsmen, and so on), and found that all but four of them owned slaves, holding between them 1626 slaves. Six of these

(including Thomas and John Rous) owned more than 100 slaves apiece (Dunn 1972: 105). These Quaker slave-owners caused anxiety to the Barbadian authorities not by questioning the institution of slavery *per se*, but by including their slaves in their Meetings for worship. This, it was feared, might incite rebellion, and thus the 1676 Act was passed 'to prevent the People called Quakers from bringing Negroes to their Meetings' (Besse 1753: II, 308).

Friends' discussions of their reasons for including slaves in their Meetings illuminate their complex relation to the ideology and practice of slavery, and do not sit entirely comfortably with the later narrative of Friends' pioneering commitment to emancipation.²⁷ In his 1672 letter 'For the Governour [of Barbados], and His Council & Assembly', a detailed refutation of criticisms of Friends' practice, Fox wrote:

Another Slander and Lye they have cast upon us, is; namely, *That we should teach the Negars to Rebel.*

A Thing we do utterly *abhor* and *detest* in and from our Hearts... For, that which we have spoken and declared to them is, to exhort and admonish them, *To be Sober, and to Fear God, and to love their Masters and Mistresses, and to be Faithful and Diligent in their Masters Service and Business; and that then their Masters and Overseers will Love them, and deal Kindly and Gently with them: And that they should not beat their Wives, nor the Wives their Husbands; nor multiply Wives, nor put away their Wives, nor the Wives their Husbands, as they use frequently to do: and that they do not Steal, nor be Drunk, nor commit Adultery, nor Fornication, nor Curse, nor Swear, nor Lye* (Fox 1672: 69).

Inclusion in Meetings, it seems, was undertaken with a view to improving what Fox took to be the worst excesses of the behaviour of both slave-owners and slaves. He argued that slaves' sobriety, godly behaviour and diligent service would cause their masters and overseers to deal kindly with them, but this treatment would be dependent on the adoption of appropriately pious behaviour by slaves. What he recommends is a kind of pact, or covenant, in which both sides amend their actions with a view to stabilising and ameliorating relations between them. It is an expressly *social* covenant, concerned with behaviours, rather than a spiritual one, though the foundation for this position continues to be articulated in fully spiritual terms. In his *To the Ministers, Teachers, and Priests*, to which the letter to the Governor and Assembly was appended, Fox restates the argument he had made in his 1657 letter:

And if you be Ministers of Christ, are you not Teachers of *Blacks* and *Taunies* (to wit, *Indians*) as well as of the *Whites*? For, is not the Gospel to be preached to all Creatures? And are not they Creatures? And did not Christ taste Death for every man? And are not they Men?... [H]ave they not Souls for you to watch over and to cure? Are they not part of your Parishioners if not the greatest part? (Fox 1672: 5).

Here, conversely, the emphasis is on the spiritual dimension of slaves' inclusion in Meetings – their souls being as worthy of salvation as those of the priests' other parishioners – and not on the social relations produced by and regulated through the institution of slavery. Both dimensions – the spiritual basis of the inclusion of slaves in Meetings, and the recommendation of a social covenant for the amelioration of conditions and behaviours – are well-developed and forcefully articulated by Fox, and evince a clear sense of Friends' affective and ethical response to slavery. But these

articulations, as already noted, are absent from the journals and narrative accounts, and are found instead in letters and pamphlets.

William Edmundson, writing of his second visit to Barbados in 1675, the year of the thwarted slave uprising, records a series of accusations and defences very similar to Fox's. He was accused of wanting to make the slaves into Christians and thereby into 'rebels, and rise and cut their [masters'] throats' (Edmundson 1829: 77); his refutation of this charge echoes Fox's:

I told him [the governor], it was a good work to bring them to the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus, and to believe in Him that died for them, and for all men; and that that would keep them from rebelling, or cutting any man's throat; but if they did rebel, and cut their throats, as he said, it would be through their own doings, in keeping them in ignorance, and under oppression, giving them liberty to be common with women (like beasts), and, on the other hand, starving them for want of meat and clothes convenient, so giving them liberty in that which God restrained, and restraining them in that which God allowed and afforded to all men, which was meat and clothes (Edmundson 1829: 78).

Like Fox, Edmundson argues that belief in Christ would help stabilise Barbadian social relations. Inclusion in Meetings effects a humanisation of slaves, he suggests, by requiring certain kinds of civil and pious behaviour, and thereby helps prevent a rebellion amongst slaves; conversely, keeping them in a state of oppression makes them more likely to cut their masters' throats, because it dehumanises and bestialises them.

Through the polemical invocation of slaves as marginal counters in a spiritual reckoning, and beyond the binarism of Friend and opponent, there emerges a Quaker position regarding slavery that is both more and less critical than such discourses might suggest. On the one hand, Fox's rationale for the inclusion of slaves in Meetings is based on an insistence on their common humanity and common spiritual needs, founded in the notion that all those not yet walking in the Light are 'captivated creature[s]'. On the other hand, however, is Fox and Edmundson's advocacy of what I have termed covenant slavery, whereby the institution of slavery is accepted, but an argument made for its amelioration through a covenant founded on the social behaviours of slave-owners and slaves, in which slaves are exhorted to adopt certain European religious and cultural values in exchange for a more 'humane' version of enslavement. The argument for the 'common humanity' of slaves, made with regard to their spiritual status, is not extended to the social domain; the 'common bondage' cited as uniting slaves and masters until saved by Christ becomes, instead, a textual decoy whereby their social bondage is ruled out of consideration. Instead of a more socially radical position, achievable through the elision of social and spiritual discourses, whereby the response to spiritual bondage might be read as in fundamental relation to its social counterpart, we find an argument endorsing the status quo, and advocating accommodation and incremental improvement through mutual commitment and concession. Just as the inclusion of slaves in Friends' Meetings produced a spiritual surplus value for their masters, so this position too is inflected by commercial discourse, in that its model of the relation

between slave owner and slave is one of exchange: the exchange of more humane treatment for loyalty and piety.

Another document by Fox, however, momentarily contemplates the possibility of bringing these two dimensions of the Quaker response to slavery to bear on each other: *Gospel Family Order*, an address originally given by Fox at a Men's Meeting held at Thomas Rous' house in 1671.²⁸ Staying in the house of this wealthy Friend and slave-owning planter, Fox found himself burdened by seeing that 'Families were not brought into Order; for the *Blacks* are of your *Families*', and wondered how 'Righteousness might be brought through in the Thing, and Justice and Mercy set up in every Family' (Fox 1676: 19). His concern is with the material and organisational consequences of the transformation of the Old Testament Law, as it related to family order, into the gospel covenant of Love. This text is concerned even less than was the 1657 epistle with the spiritual rights of household members. While spiritual equality (in bondage) is once again a given, here Fox explores the practical consequences of this within the plantation household, and how this is ordered along patriarchal lines of spiritual authority. As in Curwen's letter, the concern is principally for the consequences for the heads of families of failure to impose 'gospel order' in the household: 'will it not lye upon you, who ought to take Care for your Families, and order your Families[?]' (Fox 1676: 4). Their derelictions in this regard, Fox reminds his audience, will have material as well as spiritual consequences:

they will not be negligent in outward Things, if they be faithful to God... [F]or the Lord said, If that they keep his Law and his Word, then they shall be blessed in the Field and in the Store-house, and blessed in the Basket... but they that crucifie the Seed to themselves afresh... that brings the Curse upon them in the Basket and in the Storehouse, and in the Field (Fox 1676: 9, 12).

For planters, talk of their fields, storehouses and baskets must have had a particular immediacy.

It is when Fox pursues further the matter of material consequences that the social and spiritual begin to come together. Because '*Christ* dyed for all', Fox says, so Friends should preach Christ to 'Ethyopians' in their families, 'that so they may be free Men indeed' (Fox 1676: 13-14). Fox does not, as we might by now expect, reconfirm this freedom as purely spiritual; instead, he extends it, after an exposition of its spiritual dimensions, into the social domain:

it will doubtless be very acceptable to the Lord, if so be that Masters of Families here would deal so with their Servants, the *Negroes* and *Blacks*, whom they have bought with their Money, to let them go free after a considerable Term of Years, if they have served them faithfully; and when they go, and are made free, *let them not go away empty-handed*... and this is the Way to have the lost Image of God restored and renewed in us (Fox 1676: 16; original emphasis).

Reiterated here are the terms of a covenant slavery: manumission is a reward for faithful service, and for conformity to Christian norms of pious behaviour. Reaffirmed, too, is the sense that the spirituality of slaves has most immediate currency within the spiritual progress of the Quaker masters: this is the way to renew 'the lost Image of God' – that is, the prelapsarian perfection which Quakers believed

was available in this life to those who turned to the Light – but, notably, the renewal is to be only 'in us', the 'Masters of Families' here addressed.²⁹ Nonetheless, Fox here contemplates, and recommends, the eventual manumission of slaves as the logical conclusion of their spiritual equality. By 1675, Edmundson too had arrived at a position similar to Fox's. In a letter to Friends in America, he asks whether, for 'Negroes', 'the Yoke [must] all ways rest upon their bodies', and continues, 'which of you all would have the blacks or others to make you their Slaves with out hope or expectation of freedom or liberty?' (Edmundson 1980: 66, 67).

Fleetingly, both Fox and Edmundson extend the more characteristic Quaker habit of reading the spiritual as immanent within the social to the institution of slavery. They momentarily integrate the two lines of argument, and address the social consequences of spiritual equality (and in particular the social corollary of spiritual freedom), and the spiritual dimension of this social organisation, but they do so in such an ambiguous, tentative and parenthetical way as to perpetuate the movement's equivocation about slavery for decades to come: as Frost points out, *Gospel Family Order* was sufficiently accepting of slavery *per se* that it was republished by 'conservative slave-owning Friends in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1701 to silence the abolitionists' (Frost 1993: 70).

These two brief instances of the bringing together of social and spiritual in early Quaker writings about slavery serve to highlight their exceptional status, and further underline the 'absent presence' of this elision in the Barbadian accounts. Early Quaker textual engagement with slavery typically relied on the separation of the spiritual from the social, emphasising the equality of all in Christ, but also recommending 'covenant slavery' as a practical means for the amelioration of slavery's worst brutalities. It is in the conceptual incompatibility of these two lines of argument that sense might be made of the differences between the Quaker narratives of Barbados and of the American mainland. As I showed earlier, accounts of the mainland American travels typically elide the social and spiritual, reading the latter as immanent in the former. Such elisions are, of course, characteristic of many of the practices of early Quakerism. The refusal of hat honour; the insistence on the use of the second-person singular 'thee' and 'thou', irrespective of the addressee's rank; belief in providential punishments; going naked as a sign: all were conscious refusals of the claims of social hierarchy or propriety, and, as with the in-dwelling Inward Light itself, were predicated on a refusal to recognise any distinction between the social and the spiritual, and an insistence that these were part of a single, seamless socio-spiritual signficatory domain, not areas of distinct activity and jurisdiction.

The Barbados narratives, however, refuse to discern the spiritual in the social or the material. They eschew the usual inclusive Quaker gaze on, and interpretation of, all that falls within its purview, instead focusing narrowly but imprecisely on 'good Meetings' and friendly encounters. The spiritual domain seems, in these accounts, not to be irrelevant, but to be elsewhere, beyond the reach of the narrative. In place of the more usual synecdochal relation between the Inward Light and the social or topographical environment, where the latter is an indicative and symbolic element of the former, and the former is immanent in the latter, here the insistence on good Meetings with large crowds of sympathisers stands in metonymic relation to the

Light – associated with it, but not of a piece with it. A similar, conceptually looser, metonymic relation might be discerned in the way that the wealth that slavery allowed Barbadian Friends to accrue is read in association with the spiritual surplus value that Friends find in the inclusion of slaves in Meetings. Such inclusion does not produce them *as* Friends, but *for* Friends, just as slaves' labour produces wealth for Friends.

Atypically, an associative relation between the distinct categories of the spiritual and social, rather than elision between them, characterises the Barbadian narratives. Both domains continue to figure, but they figure separately, often in separate documents, addressed to different constituencies. Elision was perhaps unsustainable under the circumstances encountered in Barbados; the spiritual could not be read within the social without the status quo of the sugar and slave economy, in which Barbadian Friends were heavily invested, collapsing under the pressure of the encounter. The social and the spiritual dimensions of slavery figure in Quaker discourse, as we have seen, in particular, in the writings of Fox and Edmundson; but the arguments regarding the spiritual equality of slaves were ultimately incompatible with the advocacy of covenant slavery that both also put forward. The irreconcilability of these two positions – spiritual equality and covenant slavery – meant that they had to be advanced separately. Quaker planters and slave owners were themselves invested in that social inequality as well as in their theology of spiritual equality and so, in the context of Barbadian society, belief in spiritual equality could not be articulated in the usual way, through a refusal (symbolic or actual) of social inequality. If slaves were 'counters', it was in the calculation of their Quaker masters' spiritual progress, not in a more broadly focused analysis of the socio-spiritual meanings of the institution of slavery itself. It is in this uncharacteristic separation of the spiritual from the social, related to the uncomfortable relation between the material and spiritual values of the slaves for their masters, that we might begin to find an explanation for the brevity, the flatness and vagueness, the unQuakerliness, of the narrative accounts of the Barbadian visits.

NOTES

1. Thanks to Alison Findlay, Jackie Stacey and Althea Stewart for comments on earlier versions of this article.

2. The phrase 'the 1652 country' is used by Friends to designate the area covered by Fox's 1652 journey from Pendle Hill to Swarthmoor, near Ulverston, Cumbria.

3. The terms 'publishers of truth' or 'public Friends' were used for 'the itinerating Friends with the gift of ministry who spread the Quaker message' (Braithwaite 1955: 26 n. 1); see too Vann 1969: 97-101. On the importance of itinerant ministers to the early movement, see Tolles 1960: 24-29, and Moore 2000: 13-15, 25-28.

4. Tolles speculates that Fox's vision of 'Lancashire sea' might be seen as indicative of the importance of the land mass across that sea, and the later Atlantic communities of Friends, to the development of the movement (Tolles 1960: 4-5).

5. On the importance of place in accounts of early Quaker travels, see Wiseman 1998; on the relation between text and itinerancy, see Peters 1995.

6. On early Friends' beliefs about the in-dwelling Light and the godliness of the regenerate body, see Nuttall 1948; Bailey 1992; Tarter 2001.

7. Most historians claim the first transatlantic Quaker travellers to have been Mary Fisher and Ann Austin; Carroll (1968), however, argues that it may have been Elizabeth Harris.

8. See the incomplete contemporary maps of New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia and Carolina in Black 1970.

9. On early modern readings of America in relation to the Fall, see, for example, Greenblatt 1991; Hadfield 1998; Olwig 2002.

10. For discussion of the importance and development of the notion of 'suffering' in the movement, see Knott 1995.

11. Thomas Case, of Newtown, Long Island, set up a 'new form of Quakerism', asserting that 'he was come to perfection, and could sin no more than Christ' (Jones 1966: 232).

12. On the executions of Friends in Massachusetts, see Jones 1966: 63-89.

13. The italicised words were inserted by Nickalls from Fox 1911: II, 255.

14. These words are John Hull's, one of Fox's travelling companions, included in Fox 1952 because of the lack of an account from Fox himself.

15. 'An Act to prevent the People called Quakers, from bringing Negroes to their Meeting... whereby the safety of this Island may be hazared [*sic*]' (Besse 1753: II, 22).

16. Vokins was in Barbados from January or February to April or May 1681, but it is not possible to date the duration of her stay more precisely than this from her text.

17. On the colonial history of Barbados, see Harlow 1969; Bridenbaugh 1972; Dunn 1972; Puckrein 1984; Beckles 1989.

18. On trade routes between England, the Caribbean and New England, see Levy 1960: 303; Dunn 1972: 4; Durham 1972: 8.

19. For a comprehensive list of Quaker visitors to Barbados, see Levy 1960: 303.

20. For Friends' comments on their successes in Barbados, see Fox 1952: 609; Edmundson 1829: 54-55; Curwen 1680: 6; Vokins 1691: 42-43. See too Braithwaite 1961: 402; Durham 1972: 10; Shilstone 1971: 44.

21. There were also six women's Meetings thriving in 1677, with at least 186 Quaker women attending them (Cadbury 1942: 195). Regarding Barbadian demographics, Puckrein suggests that in 1652 there was a population of 18,000 whites and 20,000 black slaves (Puckrein 1984: 71). Dunn calculates a white population of about 23,000 in 1655, with about 20,000 black slaves; the white population stabilised at around 20,000 between 1660 and 1684, but the black slave population increased in these years from 20,000 to 46,602 (Dunn 1972: 75, 87). See too Levy 1960: 301.

22. By 1717, however, six years before the last of these Acts was passed, there were only two Meetings remaining on the island, at Bridgetown and Speightstown (Durham 1972: 31).

23. The 'hat controversy' resulted from John Perrot's argument that Friends should only remove their hats during prayer if directly moved by God to do so, while Fox and most other Friends maintained that it was necessary to remove the hat at such times as a mark of humility before God; see Braithwaite 1961: 228-50; Carroll 1971; Smith 1990; Ingle 1994: 197-205; Moore 2000: 193-208. On Perrot's reception in Barbados, see Carroll 1971: 66-71.

24. John Story and John Wilkinson resisted Fox's system of formalised Meetings, arguing that this ran counter to the movement's reliance on individual spiritual guidance; see Braithwaite 1961: 290-323; Ingle 1994: 252-65.

25. I am grateful to Alison Findlay for pointing out this dimension of the account to me.

26. The Church of England later ruled that conversion did not in itself emancipate slaves, rejecting the theological view that one Christian could not enslave another, and argued for the christianization of slaves; and in 1691 the General Assembly approved the baptism of blacks (Puckrein 1984: 167).

27. On the development of the Quaker position regarding slavery, see Aptheker 1940; Drake 1950; Frost 1980, 1993; Carroll 1993, 1997; Gragg 2002.

28. I am grateful to Rex Ambler for drawing this text to my attention.

29. For Fox and his followers, a state of human perfectability, or prelapsarian perfection, was possible in this life through the power of the Inward Light – that of Christ dwelling within each believer. Fox wrote that ‘God’s Christ is not distinct from his saints, nor their bodies, for he is within them’ (quoted by Bailey 1992: 39). Turning to the Inward Light would make good the losses of the Fall: as Bailey put it, Friends’ belief that the celestial body of Christ dwelt within them meant they ‘had been restored to the pre-Fall paradisiacal state. In them the restoration of the image of God was absolute’ (Bailey 1992: 44). This ‘fusion of flesh and spirit’ is at the heart of ‘Friends’ ideology of immanence – salvation embodied in the ‘celestially fleshed Christ’ of one another’ (Tarter 2001: 148).

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