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JOHN BREWIN'S TRACTS: THE WRITTEN WORD, EVANGELICALISM AND THE QUAKER WAY IN MID NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND[1]

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ABSTRACT

This study explores seven volumes of tracts collected between 1827 and 1850 by John Brewin, a Cirencester Quaker. This period was a critical one for the Religious Society of Friends, notably in its relationship with Evangelicalism. The collection allows us to test something of the nature and extent of change at grassroots level, by providing an insight into the range of issues that were of interest to provincial English Quakers, the means by which ideas were disseminated, and how they might have been received by readers. The conclusion is that, while Evangelical influence was clearly growing, Quakers remained deeply attached to processes that kept them at odds with much of the Evangelical movement.

KEYWORDS

Quakers, Evangelicalism, history of reading, John Brewin, nineteenth century.

The Library of the Friends' Meeting House in Bewdley, Worcestershire contains fifty-six books which, according to the inscriptions inside, were originally owned by John Brewin of Cirencester, and were acquired by the Meeting House in 1863. John Brewin had been born in Birmingham in 1775. He moved to Cirencester on his marriage to Hester Bowly in 1804, and established himself in business as a dealer in coal, seed and malt. By 1851 the Brewin household consisted of John and Hester, four of their adult children, (Robert, Eliza, Thomas and William), two female servants and one male servant who was also a working maltster. All the three sons at home worked as dealers like their father. Another son, Edward was a seed merchant in Worcester. Both Robert and Thomas were involved in local politics, (the former was a Conservative, the

latter a Liberal), and William became prominent in the work of the Society's Yearly Meeting, travelling on missions to India and Jamaica between 1862 and 1866.[2]

John died in 1854. In his will he provided for Hester to be maintained in their 'domestic establishment in Querns Lane [...] as nearly as may be on the same scale as at present',[3] so it was not until her death in 1863 that his household goods were dispersed. The inscription in the books indicates that, in that year, they were specifically passed to Bewdley Friends' Meeting House by Thomas Brewin as his father's executor. It is not clear why they ended up there. Edward Brewin would not appear to have been the link, as he had moved to Leicestershire in 1857. Bewdley Meeting was very small at this time and was sustained by the Zachary family of Areley Hall. Daniel Zachary, who died in 1867, had started out as a miller in Cirencester before moving to Areley with his invalid son in the 1830s, but it seems likely that he retained contact with Cirencester Friends and took the books for the struggling Meeting in Bewdley.[4]

The books were obviously works that would be considered a suitable addition to a meeting house library. However, it seems unlikely that there would have been much greater variety in individual Quaker households, where family reading matter would have been carefully selected. Quakers were advised that:

> Books may be regarded as companions; they become associated with our most retired thoughts, and insensibly infuse somewhat of their spirit and character into those who converse with them. It behoves us to exercise a sound discretion as to what publications we admit into our houses; that neither we nor our children may be hurt by that reading which would tend in any degree to leaven our minds into the spirit of the world, and to unfit us for the sober duties of life.[5]

The seven volumes of tracts chosen as the focus for this study can reasonably be seen as a very personal part of John Brewin's reading matter. The volumes are similar in appearance, and are titled on the spine *Tracts*, *Friends' Tracts* or *Friend's Tracts*. They represent collections of short works and pamphlets that were then bound into volumes by H. Smith, Printer and Bookbinder of Dyer Street in Cirencester, whose small business label is affixed to the back cover of one of the volumes. In addition to John Brewin's name, two of the volumes bear, respectively, the inscriptions 'Cirencester 1839' and 'Cirencester 1850'. The volume dated 1839 also contains one item inscribed 'John Brewin 1827'. 1827 to 1850, therefore, forms the known period of Brewin's collecting.

Of course, we cannot be sure how, or even if, John Brewin read these works. Perhaps, by his fifties, he regarded his books as a status symbol and had them bound accordingly. But certain factors suggest that, even if they were meant to 'look good' on a bookshelf, they were also cherished. The contents of each volume have been listed in a careful hand inside the front cover. The same hand has made notes on some of the individual works and corrected typographical errors.

A small number of additional items, obviously regarded as being of interest, have been pasted into the tracts. Although John Brewin led a quiet life, not achieving even the limited fame of his sons either in the community or in the Society, he appeared to be conscientious and thoughtful. According to his obituary:

> Till within a few years of the close of his life, he seldom made allusion to his religious feeling. Then, he said, though the world knew it not, it had been his practice through life to devote a portion of the day to communion with God [...] A short time before his death, he said to one of his sons, 'Though I *speak* to you on trade, naturally feeling anxious that you should do well in it, yet this does not weigh upon my mind, it does not occupy my thoughts'.[6]

Each of the individual tracts is a valuable primary source for Quaker history in its own right, but studied together in the context of John Brewin's life and times, the collection comes to represent more than the sum of its parts. It provides a window into the inner life of a provincial Quaker, and into that culture within the Society that Rosemary Mingins notes was particularly conducive to 'isolation and inwardness [...] and the growth of close supportive networks, often family linked'.[7] It takes us beyond a study of individual leaders, and into what Rufus Jones describes as 'powerful group tendencies' that existed within the Society.[8]

It is worth remembering that the form of Quaker worship gives little clue to theological trends. Even with a growing number of Evangelical Quakers travelling in the ministry, worship in England remained marked by long periods of silence, (the more vocal and revivalist style being largely confined to the west of the Allegheny Mountains in the United States). Ministry was extempore, and with no liturgy or hymns, a sense of a developing theology as it might have been experienced by ordinary Quakers, has to be gleaned from Quaker literature. Of the literature of John Brewin's time, John Punshon argues that there was 'little more than a cull of early writings to provide texts to support the evangelical interpretation of Quakerism', although Thomas Kennedy notes that Quietist authors continued to make a 'sizeable contribution'.[9] John Brewin's tracts allow us to judge what contemporary writing had come to his attention, and the extent to which that was tempered by work written in an earlier period.

The 'group tendencies' that Jones had observed in the Society by the late eighteenth century fall into three main strands. First, there was 'a clearly marked tendency to formulate Quaker thought in the direction of evangelical doctrine'; secondly, a 'reaffirmation [...] of the principle of the inward light as the sole and sufficient basis of religion'; and thirdly, a 'limited' tendency to accept rationalism and deism.[10] From a viewpoint outside the Society, the first probably became the most evident. To those who look to the career of a leading Quaker like Joseph John Gurney, the Society seemed to go through a remarkable change in theological orientation from 'an inward looking sect to an evangelical, ecumenically-minded denomination'.[11]

Quakers had been quite slow to come under Evangelical influence. The Evangelical revival had begun in the 1730s, and in the following years it both generated new denominations as well as changing existing ones. Evangelicals have never had a definitive set of doctrines, but they share enough common characteristics to be identified as a distinct movement. These are characterised by David Bebbington, a leading historian of Evangelicalism, as conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism.[12] Conversion was the central spiritual experience by which individuals became Christian, and renounced their previous sinful state. The perceived importance of conversion created a strong impetus in Evangelicals to bring it about in others, through prayer, preaching and missionary activity, and Evangelical activism certainly spilled over from propagating the gospel into more political and philanthropic work. For Evangelicals, the Bible was the source of all spiritual truth, being the uniquely inspired word of God. The crucifixion, and the doctrine of substitutionary atonement was also central. Christ, though sinless, had offered himself as the substitute to pay the penalty for human sinfulness, and to recognise this was the way to salvation. The emphasis that crucicentrism gave to the divinity of Christ was in sharp contrast to the deist and unitarian thinking that had been gaining ground with the Enlightenment.[13]

Looking back on the effect of Evangelicalism on the Society, Edward Grubb, in 1923, identified many of the same defining features: a stress on individual conversion, 'belief in the absolute and infallible authority of the Bible', and a 'scheme of salvation' that centres on 'the Divinity of Christ and His propitiatory Atonement for sin'. He contrasts this with the Quietist and 'Mystical' Quaker tradition:

> For the Mystic, the seat of authority is within the human soul, and that is true which finds its witness there; while for the Evangelical, Authority is external to man, and resides in the revelation given by God in the Scriptures.[14]

Such definitions are useful to give a broad understanding, but for the context of mid nineteenth century Quakers, they blur some complexities. In the 1830s, the Beaconite controversy in England saw the ultimate departure from the Society of what might be termed the 'ultra Evangelicals' who had put scriptural authority over that of the 'inward light'.[15] In the United States, Quakers experienced a series of more damaging splits, beginning with that between Hicksite and Orthodox (Evangelical) Friends in 1827, and centring ostensibly around disputes over divine inspiration of the Scriptures, the divinity of Christ and the atonement. Later divisions occurred with the travelling ministry of Joseph John Gurney from 1837 to 1840, when supporters of John Wilbur and more Evangelical Friends split. Wilburites stressed a strong attachment to Quaker traditions in resistance to Orthodox and Gurneyite tendencies to associate the 'inward light' with the Holy Spirit, and to rely increasingly on the Scriptures for authority.

The doctrinal differences between Friends, however, were often not clearly stated or easy to detect. Although the Religious Society of Friends in Britain remained relatively intact, divisions in the United States were inevitably felt. But how were they understood? The juxtaposition, in one volume of the tracts, with works by Gurney and Wilbur suggests that Brewin was well aware of debates. But both works were published in 1832, before the split, and both are similar in their attacks on unitarianism, so that differences over the relative authority of Scripture seem quite marginal.[16]

At this point, another strand within the Society needs to be identified, namely a strong anti-intellectualism. This is very evident within the tracts themselves, and it has profound implications for the way in which any particular doctrine was likely to be received by the reader. There was no use, Stephen Crisp advised in 1747, wishing to know more 'concerning such a point, or such a doctrine, or such a Scripture, or such a mystery [...] Cease from thy reasonings against obeying the truth'.[17] Mirroring the eighteenth century attitude is the early nineteenth century experience of John Barclay who wrote that, in his youth, he had 'compared doctrine with doctrine, and become by religious study, wise in notions, [...] and the enemy made me strong in argument and potent in Scripture'. But he came to realise that:

> All I had ever learned, read, received, held and believed, in my will, way, and time was to be given up [...] And to this day, though I have read many books which treat and support our principles [...] I dare not sit down and study Friends' opinion as science, but find myself constrained to wait upon the Lord.[18]

This was not just the approach of a birthright Friend. William Thompson, a self-taught, working class boy who had once been drawn to Methodism before finally becoming a Quaker, found that giving-up his passion for his books was a struggle, but that, ultimately, it was best to keep from reading 'as my mind is thereby at leisure to feel after that pure love which is sweeter than expression can tell'.[19]

So when looking at the tracts themselves for evidence of attitudes and developments within the Religious Society of Friends (as John Brewin would have learned of them), we need to be aware that, paradoxically, this was a valued collection of inspirational works which, even as they were being read, would have reinforced the belief that, ultimately, the written word was of comparatively little value.

There are 79 individual works within the seven volumes of tracts. Sixty three of these (around 80 per cent) were written by, or about, or addressed to Quakers. The publication date can be identified for 71 of the tracts. Only 15 had been published before 1800, and of the 56 published after 1800, 39, (or about half of all the tracts) were published in the 1830s and 1840s. There is no tract published later than 1849. Although the majority of the tracts were recent publications, the past history of the Society was a strong presence. There are eight

works that are effectively reprints of writings of early Friends, while in another eight, the writers are using substantial extracts from early Friends to justify or reinforce their views.

Eleven of the tracts deal wholly or predominantly with encouraging adherence to Quaker discipline and maintaining distinctive forms and practice. The advice was given at length and in detail. In summary, however, it centred on: silent worship without recourse to hireling ministers, sacraments and feast days; integrity in business and all dealings with the world; plainness of dress and speech; and avoidance of worldly pastimes and pleasures. Seven of these tracts were published in the 1830s and 1840s, suggesting a rearguard action against a perceived tendency for closer conformity with the outside world. 'We cannot controul the conduct of others', wrote George Richardson in 1839, 'we teach by example what we conceive [...] an adherence to truth requires', and Friends should not be deterred by accusations of 'stiffness and stubborness'.[20]

Of the tracts that were not written by Quakers, two are about slavery.[21] Given the amount of annotation on these two, slavery was a subject that engaged Brewin strongly. An additional three, works by Fenelon, John Locke on the public ministry of women, and an unknown barrister's views on tithes, also had connections with Quaker concerns.[22] Only five works have no religious content. They are a short piece cut from the *Penny Packet* and pasted into the back of one volume, on 'Pitman's Spelling Reform', a pamphlet reprinting Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights, and a summary of the provisions of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. There is a local connection with an account of a Chedworth man's dealings with an imposter who claimed to be his brother. Although this looks like 'light reading' it was presumably acceptable to Brewin since the reader is assured it contains nothing that is untrue or 'imaginary'.[23]

On the whole, Brewin appears to have heeded the advice quoted from the *Book of Christian Discipline*, and the contents of the tracts look dry and worthy. But they do have some entertainment value. Twenty six tracts (or nearly a third of the total) are autobiographical or biographical accounts, and these can sometimes form engaging narratives. A work such as John Taylor's memoir, with its account of travels, persecution, 'pow-wows' and piracy in the late seventeenth century, amounts to the Quaker equivalent of a 'ripping yarn'.[24] John Croker, in recounting the story of his life, does not let the moral interfere too much with the narrative. After a breathless description of his escape from an island off Newfoundland where he had been imprisoned by French privateers, the hasty addition of the phrase, 'I cannot forget to bless God for this deliverance', sounds a bit like an afterthought.[25] By reprinting these adventure stories of early Quakers, members of the Society may well have provided an impetus for renewed 'missionary' activity, but the accounts contain a very different style of endeavour than might have been anticipated from most nineteenth-century missionary work.

Where the tracts do deal with theology, to what extent do they suggest that Evangelicalism, as defined by Bebbington, was becoming a significant force in the Society? For Evangelicals, conversion was the experience of being 'born

again' as a Christian, but there are problems in trying to relate this to what Quakers might have meant by conversion. In the Quaker experience, a 'day of visitation' marked a recognition of God's presence in an individual's life and an awareness of sin. This would lead, in turn, to an ongoing process of becoming reconciled to God, living out a purified life.[26] Sinfulness was not considered as innate; according to the 1843 Testimony of the Orthodox Philadelphia Yearly Meeting 'we do not partake of Adam's guilt until we make it our own by transgression', and children could not therefore be sinners from their birth.[27] As another writer from 1843 pointed out, birthright membership of the Society did appear to dilute any idea of the need to be 'born again' in order to be assured of salvation.[28] Howgill, in a letter to his daughter from 1666, wrote that the need to be 'born again' was 'the need to know the seed of the kingdom in thyself'.[29] John Croker wrote that his mother wished him 'to be brought to a sense of the power of God to work me into a new lump', to find 'something at work in my heart which wants to be perfected'.[30] A century later, Job Scott wanted his children to be 'solidly grounded in the inward work', while in his own strivings against 'self activity' in his inner life, he felt that his slow progress or 'gradual attainment' was preferable to rapid change.[31] This notion of the need for inward work that was not the result of human agency or effort persisted. In 1840, an open letter to young Friends argued that 'repentance' could not be 'a sudden or instantaneous work' and that 'exhortation' could not bring about the necessary 'turning of the mind'.[32]

Others, however, were more impatient of this 'traditional' Quaker way. William Knight in his Memoir of 1839 wrote that in his youth, his 'day of visitation' was 'sinned away', and he lamented that he had not known more of 'the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit' which 'we talk of' but which, he felt, was better understood by others, 'particularly the Methodists'.[33] Edward Smith also strikes more of an Evangelical note on conversion, writing that 'the natural man knows not of God' but can only come to reconciliation when 'faith should be given to him to believe the Gospel' and 'at such a moment as this' he 'declares the price of his ransom to be already paid'.[34] For those like Sarah Anne Curties Hill who had come to Friends through an American Quaker travelling in the ministry in 1791, conversion was the dramatic experience brought 'under a visitation of divine love' making her 'a new creature in Christ Jesus', directing her 'to the narrow way that leads to eternal life, though few there be that find it'. But following Sarah's death, a letter from her Monthly Meeting to her mother, (who was not, apparently, a Quaker), does not have this 'all or nothing' feel; 'those that dwell the nearest to him, let their name and profession to religion be what it may, will experience the largest portion of heavenly food, which alone can nourish the soul'.[35]

From the evidence of the tracts, Evangelical activism and going out to win new converts, was not a hallmark of Quakers. Those like Sarah Anne Curties Hill and William Knight, who had themselves undergone Evangelical conversion, did try to bring about a similar experience in members of their families, but both were converted only shortly before their deaths. The memoir of

Patience Brayton, an American Quaker travelling in the ministry in Britain and Ireland between 1783 and 1785 illustrates how work such as this was largely aimed at upholding and revitalising membership within the Society. One man from outside the Society who heard of her wrote, in some desperation, 'I am no Quaker by profession, nor do I know whom at present to open my mind to, on that subject'.[36] It would appear that Quakers were not very accessible, something of which they were increasingly conscious. In the tracts written in the nineteenth century, it is sometimes possible to discern efforts to explain Quaker ways and language for readers outside the Society. For example, in 1839 the editor of the life of John Gray explained the nature and structure of meetings for worship, Monthly Meetings and Queries; he even tried to explain the Quaker idea of 'a secret, spiritual power, which mind exerts upon mind' by likening it to the Anglican 'Communion of Saints'.[37] But there is no mistaking a pride in what made Quakers distinctive. When it came to Quaker discipline, even Henry Tuke, whose work is regarded as a key part of the effort to move the Society closer towards the Evangelical movement, was described as recognising the importance of 'preserving unimpaired this hedge and guard of our religious principles and practice'.[38]

The evangelising of the early Quakers, as characterised in the tracts, was different from the missionary activity of the Evangelical movement. Travelling in America in 1659, John Taylor had some occasion to help the Indians on Long Island, and thereby found the opportunity 'to declare the Truth to them, and to turn them from darkness to the Light of Christ Jesus in their own hearts; which would teach them and give them the knowledge of God that made them'.[39] Unprogrammed worship and the absence of paid ministers were not conducive to institutionalised missionary activity. Richard Jennings who became teacher at Cape Town Friends' School had only been able to start his work in Africa thanks to an opportunity given to him by a Wesleyan missionary. It would seem that Friends in England did not give wholehearted support to the school started in Cape Town in 1840.[40] Quakers were aware that their differences with other denominations over missionary activity might be construed as sectarian, stemming from petty disagreements over ways of worship at the expense of what might be achieved by joint activity. But, as Catharine Phillips was at pains to explain, any 'endeavour to fix the people in the observance of forms of inefficacious ceremonies' was contrary to all that Quakers had held as true since 'their beginning as a people'.[41]

The evidence in the tracts for what might be regarded as classic expressions of Evangelical philanthropy is very patchy. The First Day School movement was taking faltering steps in Brewin's time, comprising only nineteen schools with fewer than 2,000 scholars nation-wide. Certainly some Quakers were participating in ecumenical ventures such as the British and Foreign Bible Society, and some were vigorously taking up causes such as strict Sabbath Observance and Temperance.[42] John Fothergill's work calling for total abstinence is the most glaring example in the tracts of the use of early Friends' work to justify a subsequent Evangelical position. Fothergill used William Penn's strictures against

luxuries but pointed out that he had had to 'substitute the words intoxicating liquors for those articles of luxury specified in the original', and to take the liberty of 'altering a few of the words in order more immediately to apply to the present subject'.[43]

Tracts such as this one serve to remind us of two important points in trying to understand the significance of Brewin's reading matter. First, they illustrate how Quakers' emphasis on honesty and integrity made them rather poor polemicists, so that if earlier authority was being cited to justify a current position it was done quite naively. Secondly, they remind us that, because a work was included in the tracts, this did not necessarily imply that Brewin agreed with it. We know from the evidence of his will and the Census that as a maltster, he retained interests in the brewing trade.

Attempts to make the Society an integral part of the wider Evangelical movement by taking part in joint ecumenical ventures clearly caused contention. Gurney saw it as his mission to bring the Society into the 'true and universal church of Christ', while Wilbur held firmly to the belief that it was God's will that Quakers should be a 'peculiar people' and that their testimonies would be lost if they should mingle 'with those from whom they came out'.[44] In thinly-veiled criticism of Gurney, John Barclay's letter of 1818, published in 1844, is the most outspoken of the tracts and shows the strength of feeling he had been prepared to express in private. He wrote:

> So many seemingly consistent and clean looking characters amongst us [...] are carried away by wordly notions and opinions. [...] We desire to be accounted men of liberal and enlightened views; we therefore busy ourselves [...] in the great good works that are to be brought about by the Missions of man-made ministers. [...] Dissenters and others think us lazy and lukewarm, because we do not join in their Missions, and because but few of us go on Gospel errands to distant lands. [...] Who does not see at once in all this, that their views differ from ours on those subjects, and that we cannot set to work as they?[45]

The occasion for Barclay's outburst was the plan, instigated largely by Gurney, for systematic instruction in the Bible at Ackworth School. Differences over scriptural authority were central to disputes between Evangelical and non-Evangelical Friends. In Britain, serious division seemed to threaten in the wake of the publication, in 1835, of Isaac Crewdson's, *A Beacon to the Society of Friends*, but, in the event, it was only a small number of Friends who left the Society. There was nothing in the tracts which reflected Crewdson's repudiation of the 'light within', but the degree of authority that should be afforded to the Bible was one that was alluded to by many of the writers.

Within the wider Evangelical movement, there was disagreement between those who trusted to the literal truth of the Bible, and those who argued that it was the ideas rather than the words that were divinely inspired.[46] In the ferment following Gurney's travelling ministry, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Testimony

of 1843, stressed the divine authority of the Bible, but rejected 'a literal knowledge and belief of the truths of the Holy Scripture'.[47] Elisha Bates of Ohio Yearly Meeting (and a supporter of Crewdson who also ultimately left the Society[48]) felt the need for interpretation, arguing that 'the spirit of God' was needed to open 'the things of God'.[49]

Within the tracts, discussion over the place of the Bible centred on the nature of divine revelation. An 1838 tract argued that a belief in the divine inspiration of the Bible did not preclude 'immediate revelation', but this only meant that the truths of the Bible could be transmitted directly to the soul, not that there was any message other than that of Scripture.[50] The words of Penn and Penington gave emphasis to a somewhat more creative spirituality. 'The Lord may appear where he hath never appeared before', wrote Penington, (in a work reprinted, perhaps significantly, with an introduction by John Barclay); 'Oh know the life in thy own heart, that is to be the judge in thee concerning the appearance of life in others'.[51] Penn stressed the need to be open to the spirit from wherever it came; 'the same lowly frame of mind, that receives and answers the mind of the spirit of the Lord in a man's self, will receive and have unity with the mind of the same spirit through another'. Moreover, Christ's salvation would not be denied to those who 'never had nor may have the outward knowledge or history of him, if they [...] live up to his light'.[52] This seemed to be a point of departure for Quakers from the wider Christian community. William Crowe, writing in the late eighteenth century about his spiritual struggles before becoming a Quaker, described how he came to regard as 'contrary doctrine' the view of his Anglican minister that 'inspiration, or revelation [...] was ceased, and had, ever since, or soon after the apostle's days'.[53]

In their discussion of the role of the Bible, however, Friends seemed reluctant to confront the issues. Great respect was shown for what was regarded as Robert Barclay's definitive work, but there was no real attempt at a theological analysis. Rather, the call to Quaker tradition became the touchstone. 'If we as a people were to change the place of the Scriptures, and exalt them above and put them in the place of the teaching of the Spirit of Christ,' argued Wilbur, it would 'completely overturn and change our ancient faith and practice'.[54]

For Evangelicals, the central message of Scripture was Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. Belief in this was an essential precondition to being able to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Great Separation in the United States was characterised by Orthodox Quakers as a result of a denial 'of the benefits that accrue to mankind from the suffering and death of Christ, as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world'.[55] Traditionally, it is argued, the relationship between the Jesus of the Bible and Christ did not matter greatly, the emphasis on the 'inward light' tending to lead to a conflation of the trinity into one spiritual and universally present 'seed'.[56] Howgill wrote how he had come to reject as false the idea that 'Christ, at a distance, without, had done all'.[57] William Penn's concern was with achieving unity with 'the unmeasurable and incomprehensible glorious Being of Life'.[58] Job Scott trusted 'firmly' in the divinity of Christ, but thought of the source of salvation as being by means of 'a real conception

and birth of the divinity in man'.[59] John Barclay showed that the language of the 'inward light' was slipping away, but nevertheless did not find it necessary 'to call Jesus anything beside the Holy Spirit'.[60]

Bates argued that the lack of centrality given to the atonement in early Friends' writings was because such a belief was 'almost universally admitted by Christians', and to emphasise it, therefore, 'did not appear necessary'. But he rather contradicted himself subsequently by recalling the Bishop of Cork's sneering response to Penn's acknowledgment of 'the necessity of Christ as propitiation, in order to the remission of sins' as being the first time he had ever heard it amongst Quakers.[61] It would appear that Quakers had always been sensitive to accusations of unitarianism and deism, although perhaps the sensitivity was heightened in the context of the Evangelical revival. There was an increasingly evident affirmation in belief in Christ's divinity and in the trinity. Henry Tuke sought to find common spiritual ground with the Evangelical movement whilst trying to retain something of the Society's distinctive viewpoint.

> We believe with other Christians [...] in the great and leading truths of Christianity, but while some of its professors are principally inculcating a faith to be received from our blessed Saviour's life and death [...] we think it of utmost importance to draw the attention of men to that divine light or spirit by which the work of salvation is to be carried forward in us.[62]

Gurney confidently asserted in 1832 that should a Member of the Society express unitarian views 'we should consider it our duty [...] to annul his membership'. He had no hesitation in linking the Society with 'those who approve evangelical religion [...] to whom Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Cross are precious above all things'. His position seemed unequivocal, although, subsequently, he hastened to add that such a view should not be seen as a 'formal or public declaration of faith'.[63]

Gurney presents the clearest expression of Evangelicalism within the tracts, but, overall, they give the impression of a Society still deeply attached to its 'peculiarities'. Given the divisions that were being played out within this period, there is a sense, of course, in which Brewin's collecting was already taking place within an Evangelical framework. Concerns about the place of the Bible, the use of the term Holy Spirit, and the emphasis on the divinity of Christ, suggest that, unsurprisingly, differences between moderate Evangelical and Wilburite Friends were to the fore. But there is enough early Quaker and Quietist thought, as well as some lesser known and often quite parochial works, to give a somewhat different understanding of mid nineteenth century Quakers than might be gained from looking at the Society on a more institutional level.

John Brewin kept the outside world at arm's length. Mingins has described how, with the development of economic activity and civil liberties, Evangelicalism and the idea of a 'definitive divine authority' seemed fitting to upward social mobility among Quakers, and led to greater participation in

political and philanthropic ventures.[64] Brewin, though comfortably-off, was of a lower social class than those manufacturing and banking families of Kendal and Manchester that form the focus of her study. The tracts do show that he must have had some interest in fundamental political rights and in comparatively new reform movements, such as temperance and working class education, as well as those concerns that more traditionally exercised Quakers, such as slavery and tithes. But it was for his sons rather than for him that a greater involvement in politics and missionary activity beckoned.

For the historian trying to chart the growth of Evangelical influence on Quakers there is the problem that Evangelicalism was, by definition, more vocal than the Quietist tradition. John Barclay wrote that, in the face of controversy, he found it necessary 'to be very, very silent, which has been [...] no small cross to me, and almost observable to others, I expect'.[65] Unfortunately, silence is rarely 'observable' to the historian. In the absence of clearly articulated theological debate, it looked as if new ideas were, as Punshon argues, tending 'to dribble into the Society haphazardly', while Evangelical Friends, 'with their hands on the levers of power in the main yearly meetings' inevitably became 'ascendant'.[66] Not surprisingly, Bebbington has come to the conclusion that the 'older style of spirituality [that] nevertheless lived on among Friends' was 'an undercurrent or perhaps a backwater'.[67]

However, the evidence of the tracts suggests we need to be cautious in trying to interpret the experience of mid nineteenth century Quakers like Brewin. There is a wide range of material covering a considerable time span, but it was neither collated, nor, I suggest, would it have been read in chronological order. John Taylor's 'declaration of the truth' to the Indians of Long Island in 1659 seems far removed from Gurney's participation in ecumenical efforts to help the 'Esquimaux Indian' exchange 'his filthy habit for the daily perusal of the New Testament'.[68] Brewin's copy of Taylor's work was a new edition, published in 1830, although it had first been published in 1710. Gurney's work dated from 1832. But by focussing on the dates books were written and published in order to understand the development of ideas, we are in danger of overlooking issues about the reception of those ideas. Readers do not necessarily study or digest their reading matter in logical sequence, nor do they always give more respect to one book above another because its ideas are more or less fashionable. This is perhaps particularly pertinent in the culture of the Society at this time. Although we can never know for sure how either the Brewin family, or, subsequently, Members of Bewdley Meeting read their books, collections like this help us to ask some timely questions about the way in which ideas might have persisted and competed within the Society.

As well as highlighting the range of issues and views available to Brewin, the contents of the tracts remind us of an important point underpinning Quaker thought. Books and the ideas they offered were, at best, to be regarded as 'companions'. But ultimately it was believed that there should be no more measure of 'compliance or conformity in matters relating to God, than the conviction of the light and spirit of Christ in every conscience', and 'the Lord would teach

his people himself'.[69] It was expected that the process of understanding would be a progressive one; 'our views of things do not usually open all at once', wrote Scott, 'it is so in the individual, it is so in the world, [...] it may be consistent with infinite wisdom that such a progression should always continue'.[70] Processes that form the wider historical perspective may, quite reasonably, look like 'undercurrents' and 'haphazard dribblings', would surely have felt very different to those involved. Overall, the tracts seemed to reinforce the Quaker devotional practice that trusted to immediate and continuous revelation. This, in itself, is important for our understanding both of the inner life of many ordinary Quakers, and of an uneasy relationship with the wider Evangelical movement.

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