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## Providence, Punishment and Identity Formation in the Late-Stuart Quaker Community, c.1650–1700

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### Abstract

For centuries Englishmen and women believed that any misfortune, from the smallest malady to a natural catastrophe, signified divine “justice”. Scholarship on providence and miracles has shown that beliefs in divine intervention were enhanced by the political and religious conflicts of the mid-seventeenth century. This article seeks to refine our understanding of the role of providence in confessional identity formation through an examination of Quaker providential interpretation between 1650 and c.1700. It explores the ways in which Quakers appropriated accounts of divine judgement, circulated them within their community and memorialised them for the benefit of future generations. The discovery of an attempt to create a nation-wide record of judgements to befall Quaker persecutors shows that providential stories had a significant role in uniting, and ensuring the survival of a disparate and heavily persecuted religious community.

### Keywords

Quakers; Providential punishment; George Fox; identity; memorialization; textual communities.

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### Introduction

In the autumn of 1657, an Independent minister from Badcall, in the Scottish Highlands, suffered a dramatic mental collapse after attacking members of the Quaker movement. In the account penned by the Quaker leader George Fox, the minister had been “in a great rage against Truth and Friends [Quakers]” and had “darkened his hearers” against the movement and its testimonies. But one day whilst he was preaching, he “fell down as dead in his pulpit” and was carried home by his congregation. He never recovered his senses and it was later reported that he had “stripped off his clothes, put on a Scottish plaid and went into the country amongst the dairy-women”. His almost theatrical breakdown stood as a warning to all those who attacked the Quaker movement. As George Fox declared: “by this people may see the vengeance of God that came upon him that cursed the Light [...] and it may be a warning to all others to speak evil against the light of Christ”.<sup>1</sup>

Many colourful tales of divine vengeance found their way into George Fox’s writings, where he took great satisfaction in recording the gruesome fates and remarkable judgements that befell many of the movement’s antagonists. The recording and subsequent publication of his *Journal* in 1694 came at a critical phase in early Quaker history and in the history of providentialism more widely. It has been well documented that accounts of the miraculous, prodigious and providential flourished in the tumultuous atmosphere of mid-seventeenth century England, becoming “an important site for competing discourses concerned with God, nature and politics”.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars have even suggested that competition between rival religious groups created the conditions for a “revival” of miracles and other supernatural phenomena in the second half of the century.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the expansion of natural philosophy and the rise of scientific institutions like the Royal Society offered a significant challenge to “socially disruptive”

writers and pamphleteers like George Fox, who claimed to be able to discern God's intervention in human affairs through the recording of prodigies and providential events.<sup>4</sup> As William E. Burns has shown, the association of miracles and cautionary tales with Protestant "enthusiasm" became a matter of great concern for early-Enlightenment thinkers as they foregrounded questions about religious truth, imposture and diabolism.<sup>5</sup> Despite their best efforts to separate themselves from wider society, recording instances of divine judgement to befall their opponents brought the Quaker movement into this contested world of seventeenth-century polemic.

This article examines the culture of providential punishment that underlay early Quakerism from its beginnings in the 1650s until the turn of the eighteenth century. Seventeenth-century Quakers were extreme social and political outcasts who refused to conform to codes of social deference and whose radical theological beliefs led to a wide range of accusations against them.<sup>6</sup> They stood for the new age of the "spirit" that placed the individual's relationship with God at the heart of how they interacted with one another and with wider society. Early leaders argued that a universal God-given "Inner Light" was present in all human beings regardless of their social status or sex.<sup>7</sup> Their belief in direct divine inspiration also led to highly controversial behaviour, such as their claims to perform miracles, disrupting church services, and walking naked through the streets "as a sign of the spiritual nakedness of those still dwelling in darkness".<sup>8</sup> "Truth" was spread by preaching and testifying to direct communion with God, tending towards egalitarian social arrangements that were radical for the time. They were accused of fanaticism and sedition, and experienced widespread suffering and persecution.

Although the early Quaker confidence in divine power is well known, especially in their narratives of suffering, the function that these stories of providential justice served for the evolving organisation has attracted little analysis.<sup>9</sup> One explanation for why providential punishment has been overlooked by historians is because many of these accounts remain in manuscript form: as letters, transcribed oral testimonies and minutes. Their scattered nature, combined with the fact that there is no coherent body of Quaker providential literature, has meant that they have often been overshadowed by the more directly polemical Quaker testimonies that appeared in print. Quaker providentialism did not become a part of the religious controversies that dogged many other aspects of the movement's public identity, such as the claim of some Friends to be able to perform miracles and their calls for greater gender equality.<sup>10</sup> A second reason for this scholarly oversight is a legacy of early Quaker historiography, which was reluctant to foreground this aspect of the movement's early culture. George Fox's evident pleasure in recording what he perceived to be the Lord's judgements was argued by the historian Geoffrey Nuttall to have disturbed Quaker readers, "who failed to perceive his intense devotion to justice."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the harsh attitude of early Friends towards their enemies often stands at odds with the compassionate and peaceful image that the movement and its scholars wanted to convey.<sup>12</sup>

This article will focus on the ways in which Quakers appropriated accounts of divine judgement, circulated them within their community and memorialised them for the benefit of future generations. It intersects with two recent strands of scholarship. The first is work by early modern historians on providence, showing that the search for signs of divine intervention in everyday life had an important place within confessional identity formation. The major study on providence remains Alexandra Walsham's pioneering *Providence in Early Modern England*, published over fifteen years ago. Although Walsham's chronology does not extend beyond the 1640s, her study remains invaluable

in demonstrating the importance of providentialism in creating “a collective Protestant consciousness”.<sup>13</sup> Walsham shows how texts such as John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* (first published in 1563) and Thomas Beard’s *The Theatre of Gods Judgements* (first published in 1579), which included numerous examples of “the admirable Justice of God against all notorious sinners, great and small”, facilitated the emergence of a distinct confessional identity and “exerted a powerfully formative influence on puritan piety”.<sup>14</sup> Interpreting providential punishment, however, was not the monopoly of Puritan, or even Protestant authors. Many stories were circulated by groups who did not have access to the printing press, showing that such ideas were current in private discourse beyond the world of print. As Peter Lake’s analysis of early modern murder pamphlets in *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat* has shown, early modern providential interpretation was subjective and “appropriated and reappropriated” by a range of groups across the confessional spectrum, including the excluded sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Catholic community.<sup>15</sup>

A second historiographical strand, closely interconnected with these studies on providence, has focused on the importance of texts in shaping religious experience. This had its roots in studies of persecuted religious communities, especially following the turbulent years of the Reformation. Patrick Collinson and others have drawn attention to the significance of “textual communities” in providing groups of sufferers with frameworks for understanding and overcoming their various trials.<sup>16</sup> In Quaker history, many have shown how a “discourse of unity”, stimulated by a culture of suffering, provided an important underpinning to the seventeenth-century movement. Kate Peters’s study of Quaker print culture in the 1650s provides persuasive evidence of the creation of a distinctly “Quaker” textual community. She has shown that the success of the movement’s missionary campaign was linked to its zealous engagement with the printing press.<sup>17</sup> By examining the usage of the term “Quaker” in printed tracts, Peters concludes that there was “a sustained textual development” taking place within the early Quaker community that gave their writings a clear collective status.<sup>18</sup>

Quakerism is widely held to have gathered momentum and a distinct separate identity as a result in part of the experience of suffering. The Quaker historian William Braithwaite estimated that at least 15,000 Quakers were imprisoned or fined in the years following the Restoration and that 366 died as a result of their sufferings.<sup>19</sup> Recording and collecting the suffering of members at all levels of the movement culminated in Joseph Besse’s comprehensive *A Collection of the Sufferings of People Called Quakers*, first published in 1753, which contains the names of over twelve thousand Quaker sufferers.<sup>20</sup> For John Knott, creating a hagiographic tradition and collective literature of suffering was “central to the developing identity of the sect”.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, for Catie Gill these collaborative documents became a way for suffering to be translated into a “a mass experience” that emphasised “unity and solidarity between Friends”.<sup>22</sup>

These scholarly endeavours have done much to enhance our understanding of providence and to foreground the importance of writing and suffering in establishing a coherent identity for the sect. We can see providentialism forming an important part of this shared collective vocabulary, providing a passive sufferer with reassurance and a positive mode of resistance. Stories of oppressors like the Scottish preacher of George Fox’s *Journal*, who became the subject of God’s wrath and was transformed into a figure of scorn, must have been comforting for a Quaker readership enduring the hardships of persecution. Yet no sustained attention has been devoted to the ways in which the Quaker community was constructing itself by writing, reading and rehearsing these narratives of

judgement. Focusing on a variety of early Quaker writings, including printed suffering literature, the *Journal* of George Fox, and unpublished correspondence and Meeting minutes, this article posits that accounts of providential punishment became an integral component of Quaker identity formation. It offers a detailed study of the creation of a religious “textual community” and shows how providential punishment enabled Quakers to separate themselves from the hostile world that surrounded them.

The discussion is framed around three components of identity formation, beginning with an examination of how Quakers used providence as a means to discredit and undermine their opponents. It then turns to consider how Quaker narratives of providence differed from those of their contemporaries, drawing too upon some examples of anti-Quaker providentialism. The final section focuses on another aspect of identity formation through a study of Quaker record-keeping practices. It shows the significance of memorialising historic reports of providence within an organisation facing its own internal challenges. The article maps the connections between Quakers and their seventeenth-century counterparts and accounts for the utilisation of providence by rival religious groups at the very moment when leading intellectual figures were calling for the recording of such stories to cease. It argues that for a disparate, geographically diverse and non-violent religious group like the Quakers, the act of discussing, circulating and recording tales of divine judgement offered both stability and reassurance at a time of crisis and dislocation.

### **Early Quakers and their Examples of Judgements upon Persecutors**

In the context of suffering, Quakers had frequent recourse to providential readings of their enemies’ misfortunes, both to justify the rightness of their own cause and to discredit their opponents. A number of Friends were keen to collect examples of God’s punitive hand against their oppressors. The frequency with which these accounts were reported is worthy of note, as are the wide distances across which they were observed and recorded. A small but not insignificant tranche of Quaker reports of providential punishment appeared in print, especially within treatises documenting Quaker suffering. Through them, Quakers self-consciously articulated their own spiritual strength and resilience, whilst castigating “those responsible for these grave injustices”.<sup>23</sup>

Establishing the reception, circulation and readership of published providential judgements poses a formidable challenge. It is possible that the dramatic and often sensationalist nature of these accounts were directed in part at a non-Quaker audience, with the aim of attracting new converts and perhaps encouraging oppressors to repent. The Quakers’ belief in the “inner light” and their desire to proclaim their message of “truth” to the whole world meant that they composed texts with the intention of reaching “the widest possible audience”.<sup>24</sup> Many authors directly challenged their readers to learn from the providential lessons they cited. First appearing in print in 1683, the anonymous publication *A Narrative of the Cruelties & Abuses Acted by Isaac Dennis Keeper, His Wife and Servants*, juxtaposed this Bristol prison-keeper’s cruelties with his providential downfall. Dennis had allegedly enlisted the help of two felons to beat the Quaker Marabella Farnborough “out of the Room and throw down her Bedstead and wash her out”. He also prevented imprisoned Friends from attending their “usual place of work”, resulting in the starvation and suffering of their families, as well as the deaths of some of the prisoners. It concluded with God’s dramatic retribution: “it pleased the Lord to visit Isaac Dennis [...] with his Judgements, which were very dreadful.” His ailments, mental agony and “distemper”, were so terrible that “he could not eat nor sleep but very little,”

for at night he was in “Woeful Agony, and would shake and tremble”.<sup>25</sup> His afflictions continued until his death only two months later. The author wanted to make the judgement of the Lord known to the wider public and deter other oppressors, warning them to “Take heed to their ways and actions, for every man must give an account for himself to God the Righteous Judg[e], who will render a reward to them according to their deeds, whether they be good or evil”.<sup>26</sup> The *Narrative* of Isaac Dennis’s demise sent a clear message to persecutors that despite the outwardly passive behaviour of Friends, God sanctioned their actions and would vindicate their cause.

Since the Quaker message had the potential to reach everyone, publishing served an emphatic purpose in “Convincing the world” of their testimonies. The brutal treatment of Friends in the American colonies predictably brought in its wake a range of printed reports recounting God’s actions against these persecutors too. New England became a particularly intense site of conflict between itinerant Quakers and the Puritan colonists. The 1703 edition of George Bishop’s *New England Judged* included a postscript of judgement, recounting the fates of nineteen individual persecutors, and numerous other unnamed people indirectly responsible for the suffering of Friends in the colony.<sup>27</sup> It included the judgement against Major General Adderton, who had overseen the trial and execution of Wenlock Christianson. One day whilst riding home, Adderton had been brutally mauled by a cow, “which threw him so that he died, his eyes being started out of his head like saucers, his brains out his nose, his tongue out of his mouth, and his blood out of his ears.” Poetic justice was repeatedly satisfied in this account, for Adderton had died at the very place where Friends were usually released from the cart after they had been whipped out of Boston. This “dreadful example”, as Bishop explained, was to serve as a “Divine Lesson” for all those who persecuted and “make sport at the shedding of innocent blood”.<sup>28</sup> In line with early Quaker suffering literature, *New England Judged* revealed an overwhelming confidence in God’s willingness to preserve Quaker sufferers and smite their enemies. The graphic and gruesome nature of God’s judgments would have captured the attention of a wide non-Quaker readership.

However, like many Quaker printed works and writings, narratives recounting the demise of persecutors would have been primarily directed at a Quaker audience. Underpinning these providential interpretations was a message of reassurance for the persecuted and seemingly powerless believer. The painful demise of oppressors like Isaac Dennis proved that spiritual truth would ultimately always triumph. One of the first and most extensive of these compilations emerged in the 1659 tract *A Word of Reproof, and Advice* by Edward Billing, a Westminster brewer and former soldier, who aimed to reveal the “fierce wrath of the dreadful God [...] and his righteous judgement”.<sup>29</sup> Billing had found sixty-nine “Examples that have befallen the Persecutors of the Innocent”.<sup>30</sup> Like many of the early Quaker hagiographers, Billing relies on the accumulation of detail to convey the enormity of the persecution suffered by faithful Friends and to emphasise their spiritual victory. His method was to report “some signs, examples and judgements” drawn from across the nation. Among these instances is the particularly gruesome death of Richard Hobbs, who had falsely sworn against one Tyler over the value of tithes he owed. Whilst he was bell ringing, Hobbs “was taken up with the Bel[l] rope, and tossed up and down, that the skull of his head was broken, and his body sore bruised [...] he was carried to his house, where he lay senceless for 2 or 3 dayes, and so died”.<sup>31</sup> Divine justice was also served in Wellingborough when Oliver Bletsoe, a local Draper who abused local Quakers, lost both his home and livelihood when “the house over his shop fell down to the ground”. Blescoe had encouraged his son to throw stones at Quakers passing by his

shop, and fittingly, his son was seriously injured after the collapsing masonry fell on his head and had “very nigh slain him”.<sup>32</sup>

The far-reaching scope of Billing’s project, amassing examples of providential judgement from across the country, underlines the connected nature of Quaker communities, even in the movement’s first decade. The production of printed tracts, it has been argued, was central in the development of a nationally uniform religious movement.<sup>33</sup> The expansion of Quaker publishing was facilitated through a sophisticated and complex communication network, driven by a highly itinerant body of Quaker ministers, who were able to circulate Quaker books on a national and even international scale. This was enhanced in 1672 with the establishment of the Second Day Morning Meeting—a committee of ten members appointed to supervise, censor and control the number of publications printed by Friends.<sup>34</sup> At first glance, this official bureaucratic structure seems to stand at odds with the zeal and evangelical impulse of the Quaker Inner Light. Yet it has also been regarded as integral to the “Service of Truth” because it was able to ensure the distribution of Quaker publications to all regional Meetings across the British Isles and American colonies, and establish a network of contacts to sustain and circulate those publications.<sup>35</sup> Those accounts of providence that did make it into print in the later-seventeenth century would therefore have been able to reach a broad national and international Quaker audience.

As printed reports of providential punishment became a part of the wider social networks sustaining early Quakerism, they took on added significance, as news of the plight of Quaker sufferers overseas also filtered out of the printing presses in London. In *A Word of Reproof* Billing included several judgements against New England persecutors, such as Roger Gratick and Priest Snelling, both “slain with a thunder bolt in one day”.<sup>36</sup> Another anonymous author took great pleasure in recording in 1696 “the Manifest Hand of God” against the persecuting marshals and deputies responsible for the suffering of Friends in Barbados. With a fervour similar to Billing’s, he recorded some thirty-six examples of individuals pursued by the “Judgements of God”.<sup>37</sup>

Recording and publishing providential judgements reassured Quakers of their own spiritual position and testimonies in the face of suffering and adversity, but nowhere was this predisposition to record their enemies’ misfortunes more pronounced than in the writings of the Quaker leader George Fox. “The Power of the Lord was over all” became a crucial tenet of Fox’s world outlook, and as Nuttall suggests, is the single phrase that best encapsulates his personality.<sup>38</sup> Nigel Smith even suggests that this phrase (or variations of it) acted as the “punctuation” of his writing, demonstrating an underlying sense of “the workings of divine power”.<sup>39</sup> It is clear from reading Fox’s writings that the examples of divine deliverance he observed on his travels formed an integral component of his mindset. In the 1660s, Justice Godfrey Clarke of Chesterfield made a name for himself as a notorious persecutor of Quakers. After Fox warned that “the Lord would execute his plagues upon him”, Godfrey reportedly lost his senses and “fell distracted”. His condition was so extreme that he “fell upon and bit” his maid, and “they were fain to put an iron instrument in his mouth to wrest his teeth out of her flesh”. He shortly after “died distracted in chains”, an appropriate punishment for a man who had so frequently incarcerated Quakers.<sup>40</sup>

Although no quantitative analysis could convey the evident pleasure Fox took in describing these incidents, analysis of particular types and passages of providence recorded in his *Journal* illuminates Fox’s mindset in the years covered (1648–1675). The

*Journal* includes ninety-six instances of what can be classed as “providential punishment”, where Fox believed the Lord had demonstrably intervened on his behalf against an enemy or opponent.<sup>41</sup> His narrative also reveals a striking correlation between periods of intense persecution and peaks in accounts of providential judgement. The majority of instances occur in the period 1654–68 when Quaker persecution was at its height, with almost a quarter of the total “divine punishment” examples detailed in the two years immediately following the introduction of the Conventicle Act in 1664. This made it illegal for five or more persons to meet for worship without using the Anglican prayer book. In 1666, for instance, Fox had just been released after “lying about three years in cruel and hard imprisonments” at Lancaster and Scarborough.<sup>42</sup> Recalling his harsh treatment in Lancaster, Fox seems almost to revel in the news of the downfall of his “old persecutors”, which he presents as a list. One powerful passage, describes the fates of four individuals in half as many sentences:

Richard Dodgson the chief constable died soon after, and George Mount the petty constable; and John Ashburnham buried his wife soon after, who scolded much at me in her house. Also Will Knipe the witness against me soon after died.<sup>43</sup>

It is unlikely that the actual judgements of these individuals occurred in 1666. However, it is significant that Fox chose to cite these examples together in one section rather than recording each incident individually as it appeared in the narrative. This is the method he adopts throughout the *Journal*, to underline the number and scale of punishments that the Lord had inflicted on his enemies.

There are some problems with using Fox’s *Journal* to understand Quaker providential culture, not least because it was largely composed from memory and dictated in the mid-1670s, more than twenty years after he and his followers began to spread the Quaker “Truth”. The *Journal* also underwent significant rewriting and editorial revisions in the three years between Fox’s death in 1691 and its publication in 1694. It is highly likely that many more accounts of retributive justice were omitted from the published edition of the text.<sup>44</sup> However, as Hilary Hinds has noted, the *Journal* remains “an invaluable source of information on the early movement and on how second generation Friends reflected on, and at times rewrote, that early history”.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, it is noteworthy that so many incidents of providential judgement remained in the final published version of the *Journal*.<sup>46</sup> This suggests that providential tales remained relevant for Friends even in the 1690s.

Although stories of divine judgement are most pronounced in the published writings of early Quaker activists like Fox and Billing, their observation and circulation were deeply ingrained in early Quaker culture. So deeply, in fact, that there were attempts to create a nation-wide compendium of providential judgements in each locality. References to a lost manuscript that took the concept of God punishing the wicked as its central theme, *The Book of Examples of Judgements Upon Persecutors*, were uncovered along with the *Book of Miracles* by Henry J. Cadbury in 1932. Cadbury was then able to reconstruct the “character and purpose” if not the “full contents of the ‘Book of Examples’” in George Fox’s unpublished “Narrative Papers”.<sup>47</sup> It is highly probable that this compilation was the product of a national attempt to collect and report judgement stories through the Quaker Meeting system. The movement had a regulated and hierarchical system in place that was designed to report the sufferings of local Quakers to the regional, district and annual committees. Close study of the minutes of the central London Yearly Meeting has uncovered numerous references to an attempt to collect and preserve these



instances of providential judgement. In 1676, the central London Yearly Meeting issued an order “that a generall collection be made in the townships throughout England and Wales and the City of London for the service of Truth”. A number of questions were sent out to be asked at each Monthly Meeting. Quarterly Meetings were then expected to return the written responses to the next Yearly Meeting. Question five asked Friends: “What Judgements fall upon Persecutors?”<sup>48</sup> This question established a clear link between the spreading of the Quaker faith, the suffering of members, and the comfort they sought from recording these examples.

The Quaker meeting structure provided an important opportunity for striking cases of retribution to be recorded and circulated on a national scale. The surviving minutes of the Yearly Meetings held between 1676 and 1701 attest to this strong commitment to record judgements for future generations. The 1682 Yearly Meeting set out detailed instructions on how such relations should be ordered, and reported agreement that:

all Judgments of God upon Persecutors, Informers and others, not only what has of late years befallen them, But from ye first breaking forth of Truth, be drawn up in writing, and Entred [*sic*] in every Monthly Meeting book, where it came to passe, exactly in all Circumstances of Time and place, and Attested under the hand of Witnesses; That thence it be sent and Entred in their Quarterly Meeting Books and thence transmitted yearly to this Generally Meeting, in London to be here recorded and published in Print, Or said before Authority As a service maybe soon to be therein.<sup>49</sup>

Quaker district meetings across England, Wales and Scotland would have been expected to adhere to this advice. Although it is hard to know how far these instructions were observed, Arnold Lloyd argued that annual Epistles from the Yearly Meetings were taken very seriously and “exercised a marked influence throughout the country”, as they were expected to be read in every Quarterly and Monthly Meeting.<sup>50</sup> The care the central organisation took in recording these providential accounts suggests that they possessed a symbolic as well as practical function for Friends. They would have been read out, copied and circulated to different Friends at different levels of the hierarchical meeting system, a process that invested them with authoritative significance.

The surviving evidence suggests that a large number of local Quaker Meetings responded to this call to create a comprehensive picture of “Signal Judgements upon Persecutors”. Although many of these relations are no longer extant, and some records were never completed, a sense of the scale of these returns can be observed in the manuscript collection known as “The First Publishers of Truth”, edited in 1907 by the Quaker historian Norman Penney.<sup>51</sup> This collection has been regarded as part of the effort to create a systematic history of the origins of Quakerism in England and Wales.<sup>52</sup> There are returns documenting divine retribution from counties as far apart as Cornwall, Cumberland, Lancashire, Kent and Oxfordshire.<sup>53</sup> The national scale of the project, indicates its important unifying role. Included in the returns for the “First Publishers of Truth” was the remarkable “Judgments of God that overtook the persecutors of James Parnell”, assembled by the Essex, Halstead and Colchester Meetings. These Friends could not resist recording the fates of five of his persecutors, among them John Stelham, who died after his “Cane ran into his mouth” when he fell from his horse. William Harlakenden, a local Justice, had also met a tragic end after losing his senses, “so that he would go Into fields without stockin[g]s or shoes, and over hedg[e] and ditch” until his death.<sup>54</sup> James

Parnell had become emblematic of the patient Quaker martyr, dying in Colchester prison at the age of only eighteen.<sup>55</sup> The judgements suffered by his persecutors showed a national audience the triumph of the Quaker truth, and collecting these tales of divine justice helped forge a sense of common purpose among all Friends.

### **Cautionary Tales and the Providential Tradition**

Providentialism served a specific role in Quakerism's early years and was clearly part of a collective "Quaker mindset". However, Friends also consciously drew upon a much longer Protestant tradition to inform their identity. Indeed, the Quaker desire to make persecutors and opponents the focal point of their judgement stories had much in common with the Protestant martyrologies of the late-sixteenth century.<sup>56</sup> The marketplace of providential interpretation shared between rival religious and political groups has been observed by a number of historians, and declarations of divine intervention "were not only useful ways for understanding misfortune but also politically effective polemic that could be used by individuals to support a political or religious cause".<sup>57</sup>

Interpreting God's intentions and his approval, or indeed, disapproval of contemporary morals and behaviour was an important feature of seventeenth-century culture. This became especially central in Puritan and Calvinist theology, where the uncertainty of salvation led many to look for signs of God's favour through interpreting the misfortunes of the worldly and often hostile people surrounding them. In the words of the historian Michael Winship, they "saw God's arm constantly stretched out in their favour and raised against their enemies".<sup>58</sup> Many seventeenth-century writers followed in the tradition set out by Protestant reformers like Thomas Beard and John Foxe and repeatedly drew attention to the judgements enacted against sinners that they had observed in their own daily lives.<sup>59</sup> The puritan godly considered it impossible to attain certainty about God's designs and their own destiny, but recording and sharing providential judgements offered comfort and solace, and hopeful tokens of divine favour. Walsham suggests that these examples also had especial appeal for Puritans as moralising tales against sin and corruption.<sup>60</sup>

Radical religious groups contravening religious norms and standards were often denounced by Puritan and other commentators as sinners also facing severe punishment from God. The strength and pervasiveness of anti-Quaker sentiment has been stressed by many historians.<sup>61</sup> Yet the role of providential stories directed against Quakers in feeding this hostility has remained largely overlooked, despite the fact that Quakers were frequently the targets of these didactic accounts. The New England Puritan divine Increase Mather, in his 1684 tract *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*, called on his readers to observe "the blasting rebukes of providence upon the late *Singing and Dancing Quakers*, in signal Instances".<sup>62</sup> Among them was the judgement that befell Jonathan Dunen, who had run away with a fellow member's wife.<sup>63</sup> Mary Ross had been "possessed by the Devil", burning all her clothes, uttering "prodigious blasphemy", and allegedly participating in the ritual sacrifice of a dog.<sup>64</sup> *An Essay* also included the divine judgement on the English Quaker Robert Churchman, whose conversion had led him to be haunted by evil spirits—"a Spirit of delusion."<sup>65</sup> Although Mather tended to focus on the mental rather than physical punishments of these "Dancing Quakers", his claim that these torments were the consequence of sinful and heathenistic behaviour must have made a significant impression on his readers.

Puritan accounts of providential judgement against Quakers fit within the rubric of “judgements” begun by Puritan authors like Thomas Beard prior to the 1640s, where the wrath of God was provoked by sinful behaviour such as murder, blasphemy or adultery. As Mather’s narrative suggests, they also linked Quakers with the diabolical, and anti-Quaker stories did not necessarily have to be associated with outward disaster to be interpreted as providential. A Quaker convert could be presented as possessed by evil spirits, which had driven him to distraction and despair. In *The Foot Out of the Snare* (1697), the lapsed Quaker John Toldervy related how he had plagued by Spirits for twenty-five days. They had prevented him from sleeping, and had “moved [him] by the power of that Spirit” to carry out such acts as unnatural fasting. Only later did he come to realise that the Spirit within him had been “the Devil”.<sup>66</sup>

The Puritan inclination to view providential punishment against Quakers also permeated private diaries and personal memoirs. The nonconformist Essex clergyman Ralph Josselin noted in his diary on 25 December 1674 that the Quakers about his township had built a new meeting house and increased their numbers under the influence of John Garrad, “their head in our town”. He adds: “I doe not determine why; but this morning viz. 26. that Garrads wife died, within 6 weeks of the use of that house.” Josselin clearly felt that Garrad’s religious affiliation was the cause of his wife’s death. “I onely desire to feare and tremble”, he went on to explain, “but doe not question the downfall of that sect under the feet of Christ and his servants.”<sup>67</sup> Although Josselin is cautious about his own ability to discern God’s purpose in this incident, the underlying message is clear. For those Puritans attempting to find reassurance and validation, the intervention of the divine in the everyday acted as a constant guide to God’s will.

The Quaker theology of the universal God-given “Inner Light” has conventionally been viewed as the logical extension of radical puritanism, with many arguing that Friends expressed social and political ideas in accord with many other groups of the time. Leading historians of the movement, such as Geoffrey Nuttall, Hugh Barbour and William Braithwaite posit that George Fox and his fellow-converts were influenced by and spoke to many of the concepts and theologies of the radical Puritans.<sup>68</sup> The parallels between Quaker notions of divine punishment and those cited by their contemporaries are notable. Indeed, Fox took great pride in his Protestant heritage and many of the instances of divine retribution he recorded shared much in common with the judgement stories against the Marian persecutors cited in John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*. Among them was a story from the reign of Henry VII of an escaped bull that charged at the Catholic official D. Whittington and “gored” him to death shortly after he had supervised the burning of a Gloucestershire martyr.<sup>69</sup> George Fox also recorded attacks by bulls, such as the downfall of the “wicked man” and “cruel persecutor” Colonel Thomas Robinson of Cornwall, who met his gruesome death in 1663 after a savage attack by his own bull.<sup>70</sup> Fox also cites the fate of a Somerset Presbyterian, “a wicked man” notorious for disturbing Quaker meetings. On his way home, he got too close to a bull, who, according to Fox “struck his horn under his throat and struck his tongue [...] which hung lolling out of his mouth as he had used it in derision before”.<sup>71</sup> This suggests that Fox may have actively chosen this stereotyped repertoire of judgements as a suitable demonstration of just recompense for a suffering people.

Fox’s practice of rehearsing versions of divine judgement taken from the Protestant hagiographical tradition is also indicative of his readiness to view himself “as an inheritor of the teachings and bloodlines of the first English martyrs”.<sup>72</sup> His *Journal* even opens with the lines: “My mother was an upright woman; her maiden name was

Mary Lago, of the family of Lagos and of the stock of the martyrs”, suggesting that from an early age Fox consciously saw himself as a descendant of these early Protestant heroes whose suffering had been vindicated by divine intervention.<sup>73</sup> No religious community of the late-seventeenth century suffered more than the Quakers. It is therefore fitting that Fox and his fellow-sufferers saw the Protestant martyrs as an exemplary model for understanding and coming to terms with their experiences. As John Knott has argued, writers like Fox and the eighteenth-century Quaker hagiographer Joseph Besse sought “to justify their resistance to persecution by placing themselves in a tradition of martyrdom” whose origins they found in both sixteenth-century martyrologies and in the Bible.<sup>74</sup>

One notable difference between Quaker accounts of providence and those of their contemporaries, is the moral character of those struck down by divine punishment. Puritan and Protestant providential judgements were generally associated with immorality and sin, rather than explicitly with persecution.<sup>75</sup> Writers like Thomas Beard and Henry Burton, as well as lesser-known authors like Edmund Bicknoll and Thomas Reynolds, were concerned with punishments meted out by God on those who broke divine law for acts such as drunkenness, adultery, swearing and profaning the Sabbath.<sup>76</sup> Vengeance stories against persecutors were certainly incorporated into these anthologies of providence, but they fitted into the much wider category and literary genre of “God’s judgements on heinous sinners”.<sup>77</sup>

Quaker writings, by contrast, made persecutors and detractors the almost exclusive subjects of their narratives of divine retribution. Part of the explanation, of course, is that early Quakers were subject to fierce persecution that far exceeded anything pre-war Puritans had experienced. Another explanation of the difference is theological. Predestinarian doctrines emphasised the exceptionality of those able to achieve salvation and thus used evidence of sin and divine sanction against others as reassurance of their own spiritual status. They therefore tended to be more personal, because they were used to reassure the recorder of their membership to an elect congregation.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, the Quaker belief in a universal God-given inward light meant that Friends did not have the same need to distinguish the godly from the ungodly—every individual, including sinners, had the potential to repent and receive the “Inner Light” and thus enter into divine communion. This is clearly pronounced in early Quaker publications, where calls for repentance and warnings served as affirmation of the regenerative power of the Inner Light, since God’s grace was freely available to all.<sup>79</sup> Published Quaker tracts, it has been argued, were “valued as specific instruments of ‘convincement’”, where it was anticipated that the process of reading them would encourage conversion.<sup>80</sup> Since the Quaker inner light had the potential to reach everyone, the applicability of providential judgement was potentially more far-reaching than those drawn from the Puritan tradition.

Circulating reports of providential judgement also proved necessary for a movement that denounced violence and largely disengaged from politics. Like many nonconformist groups of this era, Quakers were committed to a principle of non-violence. The anti-Royalist collection of prodigies recorded by dissenters in the two volumes of the *Mirabilis Annus*, published in 1661 and 1662, enumerated “many strange and remarkable Accidents, together with divers eminent and signal Judgements” against “Persons, who have Molested and Persecuted” peaceable people. One man died suddenly in 1662 at the very moment “he was accusing and complaining against some godly Non-conformists to the Bishop of Chester”.<sup>81</sup> Such accounts could serve as “spiritual weapons” and proof that persecution and scorn was vindicated. Yet Quakers went further than any other

dissenting group of this period in making pacifism and non-violence a formal part of their theology.<sup>82</sup> In the absence of being able to physically confront their enemies, these stories of judgement could serve a distinctive role for early Quaker solidarity by making the distinction between physical and spiritual vengeance clear. Indeed, a number of Quaker publications announced that a spiritual war was being fought. In a statement addressed to the Council of Oliver Cromwell, later published in his *Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder* (1662), Edward Burrough reviled those who “make War against the Lamb and his Followers [...] by which they unjustly suffer the imprisonment of their Bodies and the spoiling of their goods”, he warned that the “greater will my Judgements be upon your heads, except you speedily repent”.<sup>83</sup> This was an image drawn straight out of the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation 13:8: “and all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [...] of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”.

Peters has recently characterised Quaker apocalyptic threats as a “canny strategy of political engagement”, because the language and threat of providential violence would have been broadly understood and shared by their contemporaries. Quakers were thus able to negotiate with ruling powers, because the violence came not from them, but from God.<sup>84</sup> Because Quaker opponents were human rather than diabolical agents, accounts of divine vengeance became a metaphorical symbol for confronting violence. The Quaker invocation of the Lamb’s War and belief in divine judgement reflected the apocalypticism that was so prominent in the early writings of many Friends. Quakers searched for evidence of divine intervention in anticipation of the arrival of a spiritual kingdom of Christ as foreshadowed in Daniel and Revelation. This millenarian optimism, as Bernard Capp demonstrates, was the product of a “long tradition among Puritans of interpreting all political events in an apocalyptic or millenarian sense”.<sup>85</sup> Publications such as George Fox’s *A Warning to this Proud City* (1654), Richard Farnworth’s *A Brief Discovery of the Kingdome of Antichrist* (1653) and Thomas Greene’s *A Trumpet Sounded out of Zion as a Warning to all the Inhabitants of the Earth* (1662), offered dramatic warnings of providential ruin and destruction.<sup>86</sup> Humphrey Smith, whose *Vision Which He Saw Concerning London* was printed in 1660, foresaw “the city, herself and her suburbs, and all that belonged to her” with “a fire [...] kindled therein”.<sup>87</sup>

In the context of Quaker suffering, John Knott stresses that the “passive acquiescence” of Quaker sufferers was predicated upon a belief that “the Suffering *Lamb* must have the Victory”.<sup>88</sup> A powerful message was sent to Quaker sufferers: that they could find reassurance from the fact that God was demonstrably smiting their oppressors and persecutors on their behalf. A clear motif that emerges in these narratives is the number of weak and vulnerable Friends who are vindicated by divine intervention.<sup>89</sup> Cornish Friends included the “heavy Judgement of God” upon the individual responsible for abusing Jane Reynolds in August 1672, when she was “great with Child”, by dragging her on “[the] ground and in [the] dirty Kennel”. His whole family was struck with sickness and he “grew distracted”.<sup>90</sup> In the “Great Book of Sufferings”, witnesses subscribed their names to the judgement that befell Richard Leach of West Alvington in Devon, who “died in a miserable condition” after he and a group of informers broke into Elizabeth Phillips’s house, and “Totally plundered her House”, not even leaving a bed for her and her four children.<sup>91</sup> The Countess of Derby was also the object of divine vengeance for her hand in the death of the elderly Friend Oliver Atherton. He had refused to pay tithes and, on the orders of the Countess, was then cast into prison for two and a half years. The Countess rejected the petitions of Atherton’s family for his release after he became ill, and even prevented his family removing his body from prison after he died. “She cast away all pity,

mercy and tenderness”, but met her comeuppance, “for exactly three weeks after the day Atherton was buried, she died.”<sup>92</sup> Recognition of the frailty of many of these Quaker sufferers and martyrs promoted the Christian paradox of strength through weakness, as described in 2 Corinthians 12:9. The concept was central to Christian doctrine, and the self-designation of weakness and incapacity was often invoked by Quaker men and women as evidence of their elevation as instruments or agents of the Lord. Observing, recording and then circulating stories of divine judgement therefore became a powerful weapon for an otherwise defenceless movement.

### **Memorialising and remembering signal judgements**

Quaker accounts of providence undoubtedly shaped the collective outlook of the early Society. It is difficult to know exactly who these relations of providence reached, but one telling fact is the movement’s continual concern to record and memorialise them for the benefit of future generations. Recent scholarship on the consequences of transformative events like the Reformation, Civil Wars and Restoration has shown how authorities pursued new forms of commemoration and memorialisation to establish distinct political or religious identities.<sup>93</sup> In the closing decades of the seventeenth century, Quakerism was facing its own internal divisions and struggles to retain its members, a fact that has often been noted in its history.<sup>94</sup> Once the Restoration had ended hopes for achieving religious toleration, Quakers faced organisational changes with an increasing focus upon retaining the faith within, rather than attempting to evangelise beyond their religious community. Preserving testimonies of signal judgements thus served an important consolidating function for the movement as it made its transition from a radical and rapidly growing sect to a settled church.<sup>95</sup>

At first glance, the culture of reporting providential judgement stood at odds with the evolving Quaker organisation. In line with the changing focus of post-Restoration Quakerism, there were efforts to present a more “respectable” front to the Society in the hopes of securing religious toleration. The establishment of the Second Day Morning Meeting in 1672, the official committee that controlled the Quaker press, undoubtedly came in response to this cultural shift, as Friends became increasingly concerned about the image of the movement they sought to convey.<sup>96</sup> All Quaker publications, including George Fox’s *Journal*, were subject to scrupulous editorial input. Friends were willing to drop any reports of miraculous or providential divine intervention that could not be verified by witnesses.<sup>97</sup> Rosemary Moore has suggested that Quakers failed to publish George Fox’s *Book of Miracles* because of its potential to revive “old controversies about extravagant Quaker behaviour”.<sup>98</sup> This changing outlook must have altered the public image of Quakerism and affected the number of overtly providential accounts appearing in print.<sup>99</sup>

The introduction of formal Toleration in 1689, moreover, also altered Friends’ relationship with wider society. Persecution of religious minorities declined and many Friends gained respectability within their communities, as they adapted to new economic possibilities and learnt to co-exist with the wider world.<sup>100</sup> These developments caused great anxiety among Quaker elders, who feared that the message was becoming diluted.<sup>101</sup> A clear link between the decline of suffering and the recording of signal judgements is evident in the 1701 Yearly Meeting Minutes, where Friends agreed that such accounts should no longer constitute a formal part of Quaker annual business:

It’s proposed that the question what judgments are come upon persecutors be now suspended seeing through the good Providence of God and favour of the

Government we have our liberties, and the same is agreed to, only if any remarkable example falls on any person it be minded and brought.<sup>102</sup>

By the turn of the century the recording of judgements had thus become an optional, rather than obligatory process, reflecting a clear shift in the Quaker use of supernatural justice as a component of the movement's self-validation.

It is important to note, however, that the culture of recording providential judgements had helped to create a shared message of unity for an increasingly disparate body of believers. Second and third generation Quakers, as Pink Dandelion notes, "were waiting for the kind of transformation that their parents had experienced."<sup>103</sup> The great lengths to which Friends went to collect these reports and make them part of their formal institutional practices suggests that the belief in divine intervention was integral to the developing identity of the movement. The impulse of Quaker leaders from the 1670s to use the Meeting system to collect, record and recount stories of persecution (and the subsequent downfall of the persecutor) was characteristic of a commitment and zeal they feared would soon be lost.

It is probable that Friends had been informally recording judgements upon persecutors before their codification in 1676. Dolobran Meeting in July 1668, had asked for "judgments that fell on the heads of persecutors" along with reports of "all births, marriages, deaths and sufferings of Friends of all kinds".<sup>104</sup> The official systematized recording of "Gods Judgements upon Persecutors and Opposers of Truth" in 1676, occurred at a time when the movement's leaders were seeking greater religious liberty and employing strategies to reshape their social and political activities, which included codifying their religious testimony and doctrine.<sup>105</sup> The same year that this decision to record judgements was made by the elders of the Yearly Meeting, the Scottish theologian Robert Barclay, had published his *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* in Latin (later translated into English in 1678) which set out Friends' theological principles for the instruction of both Quaker and non-Quaker readers.<sup>106</sup> It is notable, for instance, that the 1678 Yearly Meeting directed local meetings to collect "Examples of Gods Judgements upon persecutors and Opposers of the Truth since the first breaking forth of Truth in England". They made clear that this was necessary "soe nothing may be lost in these cases of suffering for our Testimony".<sup>107</sup>

Friends were not necessarily looking for contemporary examples of judgements, but instead wanted to preserve earlier examples, known within the localities from the beginning. After recording the death of the persecutor Henry Macham the minutes of Warborough meeting in Oxfordshire state:

And indeed it wase very remarkable, and worthy of being taken notis of and remembred to generations to com[e] how they are found fiteing against the Lord in exercising cruelty towards his people, For it was not long after this man wase cut of[f].<sup>108</sup>

This form of Quaker record-keeping reflected a desire on the part of second and third generation Friends to inspire future generations with the zeal the founding fathers had shown. A large number of these accounts were even recorded after the passage of the 1689 Act of Toleration and 1696 Affirmation Act. It is notable, for instance, that the London Yearly Meeting reminded local meetings in 1694, 1695, 1696 and 1700 to "keep a true record of manifest Judgements upon Persecutors [...] as a Warning to Posterities".<sup>109</sup> Herefordshire [Ross] Monthly Meeting, even signed and circulated a

report of providential judgement in 1707, observing the macabre demise of the persecutor Edward Merrett who “dyed miserably”.<sup>110</sup>

Recording the unsavoury fates of persecutors as a religious legacy encapsulates how the memorialisation of persecution served to consolidate early Quakerism. Eamon Duffy’s study of the Exmoor village of Morebath has shown how the keepers of parish registers and church accounts became conscious actors in the construction of the collective memory and identity of their communities, as the texts they had painstakingly recorded were read out loud and discussed.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, the efforts of those Friends and Meetings who collected and recorded the judgements befalling oppressors must have enabled late-seventeenth century Quakers to convey a shared sense of history, pride and collective identity. The Quaker historian Betty Hagglund has characterised handwritten Quaker epistles, minutes and other manuscript reports as “public documents”, intended for circulation and distribution to a multiplicity of readers.<sup>112</sup> The reappropriation of individual judgement stories is encapsulated in the report of Cornish Friends in 1663 about the fate of the persecuting justice Thomas Robinson, mauled to death by his own bull. It was subsequently told and retold in a range of mediums and forums, even making an appearance in George Fox’s *Journal*.<sup>113</sup> A marginal note in the manuscript minutes, where the suffering was first documented, referred the reader for further details to “ye list off ye Judgements upon persecutors”, hinting at its presence in the lost *Book of Examples*.<sup>114</sup>

In a climate in which Friends gradually came to enjoy increased toleration and integration into wider society, these narratives of divine vengeance would have kept alive an association with early Quaker sufferings for future generations. A number of accounts of “signal judgement” against former persecutors continued to be observed by Friends across the country. In 1695, Frandley Monthly Meeting in Chester reported the misfortune that struck a number of constables and Justices of the Peace, responsible for breaking up Quaker meetings, seizing their Meeting House and imprisoning Friends between 1677 and 1683. It noted how God inflicted one of these persecutors for a number of years with “a grievous canker in his mouth that consumed his pallat” and “eat his whole nose off”. His syphilitic condition had made him “loathsome to sight of all people, whose memorial as well as body now rotts”. He reportedly committed suicide in 1691, some eight years after the persecution of Friends in that county.<sup>115</sup> This “telescoped time-frame”, to quote Walsham, was a strategy commonly employed in stories of divine retribution “to enhance the teleological link between cause and effect”.<sup>116</sup> It showed that whilst the suffering might have come to an end, Friends continued to look for signs that God was exacting justice against those who had historically wronged His people.

This desire to continue reporting providential judgements can in some respects be viewed as a collective response to continuing unofficial persecution. It is now well established that the 1689 Act of Toleration did not put a stop to the intolerance and prejudice experienced by religious minorities.<sup>117</sup> But perhaps more significant, the process of recording, circulating and reading acts of divine judgement would also have enabled the organisation to demonstrate to these new generations of Friends, who were born into the movement, that God continued to exact vengeance against anyone who opposed their message. Selective relations of providential judgement were even appropriated by the Quaker hagiographer Joseph Besse in his compendium of Quaker suffering, first published in 1753. Although the two-volume collection was primarily designed to convey the intensity of Quaker persecution, Besse also aimed to draw attention to “the magnitude of their spiritual victory”.<sup>118</sup> Citing God’s judgements would



have bolstered this message. Although the strong graphic images of gore and torment characteristic of earlier Quaker stories are notably absent, Besse nevertheless still noted the deaths and misfortunes of a number of persecutors, retelling the judgement on the Bristol prison-keeper Isaac Dennis in 1683.<sup>119</sup> In Lincolnshire in 1669 a “persecuting Priest” named John Hunleby had been warned “of the Judgments of God upon Persecutors”, but continued to threaten and arrest Friends. Besse records that Hunleby’s plans, however, were frustrated after he was “suddenly struck with a mortal Disease that Night, so that he died a lingering Death”.<sup>120</sup>

Joseph Besse was shaped by a conservative Quaker culture, yet he clearly saw the value of citing judgements upon persecutors. Transmitted in different forms and for both personal and “official” use, these judgement stories served as a potent evangelical tool *within* the evolving Quaker community, as they remained freighted with the emotion of those who had experienced suffering first-hand and then watched with joy as the Lord cut off their enemies. Almost all of these narratives of heavenly revenge were designed in some way to consolidate the movement’s identity, or to heal or forestall division. They became a “testimony” to the memory of those who suffered and offered an exemplary model for sustaining the bonds of community between new generations of believers.

## Conclusion

Quaker accounts of supernatural justice against persecutors give us a prism through which to understand some of the tactics they used to discredit their opponents and, ultimately, to unite a disparate body of believers. The essentially permeable and contingent nature of belief in the power of an omnipotent God, and his intervention on behalf of a particular cause, pervaded both the early Quaker mindset and seventeenth-century society more widely. The numerous journals, publications, manuscript and verbal reports circulated by early Quakers reveal the extent to which providentialism remained deeply embedded in dissenting culture. This extends the arguments of Walsham, Shaw and Burns on the revival of providential and miraculous reports within the late-Stuart period, casting doubt on the Weberian thesis of the “disenchantment” of the early modern world.<sup>121</sup> In an age that questioned the supernatural and demanded higher standards of “scientific proof”, Quakers were still keen to demonstrate and derive inspiration from Old Testament precedents of divine judgement. It also reveals the important link between verbal, scribal and published accounts of providential judgement that is often absent in the historiography of early modern providence.

Although providential interpretation was never exclusive to Quakers, how they chose to interpret, present and document the downfall of their enemies had a distinctive character. This was catalysed by an unparalleled culture of extreme suffering, persecution and isolation from wider society. Zealous Protestant authors, observing the relationship between providentialism, religion, politics and English society, were much more concerned with the downfall of sinners and identifying those sins that had provoked retribution. Quakers, by contrast, made persecutors rather than sinners the focal point of their judgement stories, highlighting the link between human rather than diabolical agency. Their propensity to look for signs of providential judgement derived from a self-assured sense of martyrdom. For early leaders like George Fox, their redemption was confirmed by examples of God punishing those who stood in their way. In print, private writings and meetings, Quakers from across the socio-political spectrum looked for confirmatory proof that God was vindicating their cause.

Integrating providentialism into narratives of early Quaker suffering helps us to better understand the strategies the early movement employed to foster a coherent sense of identity and in mediating its relationship with the wider non-Quaker “world”. It has become conventional to argue that belonging to the early Quaker movement enabled many isolated, persecuted and suffering Friends to find new and meaningful ways to form close spiritual connections. This article has shown that providentialism heightened this sense of unity by forging bonds of community between groups of sufferers over both large geographical distances and over time. The national system that was established for the recording of the “signal judgements” to befall persecutors was a particularly important unifying aspect of the early movement, especially in the later decades of the seventeenth century when the movement faced its own challenges of survival. Not only were individuals willing to report these events to fellow Friends via the Meeting system, they could view divine justice on others as a personal assurance of the rightness of their own spiritual status. Providential judgement stories offered a means of engaging with the enemy in spiritual, non-violent terms and provided an idiom capable of uniting a persecuted, diverse and geographically scattered movement. The circulation of these accounts exercised a profound consolidating influence on the nascent Quaker community and deserves to be acknowledged as an integral component in early Quaker identity formation.

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### **Notes**

1. Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, 318–19.
2. Burns, *Age of Wonders*, 3. See also: Burns, “John Spencer”, 237–52; Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution*, ch. 1; Durston, “Signs, Wonders and The English Civil War”, 22–28; Kingsley, “Interpreting Providence”, 251–67; Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England*.
3. Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England*, 2–5.
4. Burns, “John Spencer”, 249.
5. Burns, *Age of Wonders*, 57–96.
6. The theological implications of adherence to Quakerism have been amply explored by historians. See for example Barbour, *The Quakers*; Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, 279–305; Kesselring, “Gender, the Hat, and Quaker Universalism”, 299–322; Moore, *The Light in their Consciences*, 88–97, 155–64; Reay, “Popular Hostility Towards Quakers”, 387–407.
7. On Quakerism and women see Mack, *Visionary Women*.
8. Hinds, *George Fox*, 2.
9. One exception to this is Hilary Hinds’s recent study, *George Fox*, ch. 3.
10. On Quaker miracle controversies see Moore, “Late Seventeenth-Century Quakerism and the Miraculous”, 335–44; on Quakers and gender equality see Mack, *Visionary Women*, ch. 7.
11. G. F. Nuttall, “Introduction: George Fox and His Journal”, in Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, xxii–xxiii.
12. See Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*; Braithwaite, *Second Period*.
13. Walsham, *Providence*, 5.
14. Beard, *Theatre of Gods Judgements*, title page; Walsham, *Providence*, 19.
15. Lake, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat*, 322–24.
16. Collinson, “John Foxe and National Consciousness”, 19–21; Love, “Oral and Scribal Texts in Early Modern England”,
17. Peters, *Print Culture and the Early Quakers*, 253.
18. *Ibid.*, 99.
19. Braithwaite, *Second Period*, 115. See also Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings*, 2 vols.
20. Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings*, 2 vols.
21. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, 217–18.
22. Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community*, 41–42.
23. Pestana, “Martyred by the Saints”, 173.
24. Peters, *Print Culture*, 72; O’Malley, “Defying the Powers and Tempering the Spirit”, 72–88.
25. Anon., *A Narrative of Cruelties & Abuses*, 7–26.
26. *Ibid.*, 27.
27. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 473–98.
28. *Ibid.*, 463–64.
29. Billing, *A Word of Reproof*, 3.
30. Billing, *A Word of Reproof*, 1.
31. *Ibid.*, 82.
32. This account is reminiscent of the 1623 catastrophe at Blackfriars, when a large building collapsed on a congregation of Catholic worshipers. See Walsham, “‘The Fatall Vesper’”.
33. Peters, *Print Culture*, 43–44.
34. O’Malley, “Defying the Powers and Tempering the Spirit”, 76.
35. O’Malley, “Defying the Powers and Tempering the Spirit”, 79–81; Landes, *London Quakers*, chs. 1, 2 and 5.
36. Billing, *A Word of Reproof*, 80.
37. Anon., *A Short Account of the Manifest Hand of God*, 14.
38. Nuttall, “Introduction”, in Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, xix.
39. Fox, *Journal*, ed. Smith, xxiv–xxv.
40. Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, 204.
41. Figures based on a detailed reading of the Nickalls edition of George Fox’s *Journal*, which spans the years 1648 to 1675. Here, all those incidents cited by Fox between these dates that either involved the misfortune of a Quaker opponent or explicitly recognised the hand of God in the events have been recorded. I have discounted figurative references to providence, for example to

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where a moment of divine intervention had occurred, but didn't involve a direct act of divine punishment, such as when Fox would report that "the Lord's power came over all". Fox, *Journal*, 96. A fuller survey and detailed methodology is provided in Naomi Wood, "So the Lord God Brought His Judgements Upon All", ch. 1.

42. Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, 510.

43. *Ibid.*, 504–05.

44. Cadbury ed., *George Fox's Book of Miracles*, 92. Details about the foundation and role of the Second Day Morning Meeting are given in O'Malley, "Defying the Powers and Tempering the Spirit", 72–88.

45. Hinds, *George Fox*, 8.

46. Fox, *Journal*, original ed., 456–7.

47. Cadbury ed. "Examples of Judgements upon Persecutors", 227.

48. Library of the Religious Society of Friends, YM/M1 Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1668–1693, 18 May 1676, fols. 29–30 (hereafter cited LRSF).

49. LRSF YM/M1 Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1668–1693, 6 June 1682, fols. 109–110.

50. Lloyd, *Quaker Social History*, 143–4.

51. Penney ed. "First Publishers of Truth".

52. *Ibid.*, xii.

53. Penney ed. "First Publishers of Truth", Cornwall: 24–29; Cumberland: 60–76; Lancashire: 147–51 and 335–9; Kent: 133; Oxford: 208–17.

54. *Ibid.*, 97.

55. For more on Parnell's sufferings see Besse, *A Collection of Sufferings*, vol. 1, 190–92.

56 The most influential of these was John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*.

57. Kingsley, "Interpreting Providence", 254.

58. Winship, *Seers of God*, 2–3.

59. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*; Thomas Beard, *Theatre of Gods Judgements*.

60. Walsham, *Providence*, 3.

61. Barry Reay argued that popular animosity towards the movement was "stimulated and encouraged by indoctrinating anti-Quaker propaganda". Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (London, 1985), 77.

62. Mather, *Illustrious Providences*, 338–56.

63. *Ibid.*, 346.

64. *Ibid.*, 346–47.

65. *Ibid.*, 348–53.

66. Toldervy, *The Foot out of the Snare*, 26–7

67. Josselin, *Diary*, 581.

68. Hugh Barbour described early Quakers as "puritans", with whom they shared "most of their insights, ethics and worship". He noted that their conflicts with puritan leaders were more akin to "a family feud" than any great theological difference. Barbour, *The Quakers*, 2; See also Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, ch. 1; Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*.

69. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583 edition), 776.

70. Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, 446–47.

71. *Ibid.*, 363.

72. Patuleanu, "George Fox's *Journal*", 33.

73. Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, 1.

74. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, 223.

75 The Puritan layman Nehemiah Wallington collected hundreds of contemporary and historical cautionary tales. This included a judgement from God against Sabbath breakers which took place at a bear baiting in Paris Garden in 1583. The scaffolding collapsed underneath the spectators, leaving eight dead and a large number injured. He recorded it as "A warning to such, who take more pleasure on the Lord's day to be in a theatre beholding carnal sports than to be in the church serving God". Wallington, *Historical Notices*, 49.

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- 76 See for example: Edmund Bicknoll's *A Sword Against Swearing* and John Reynolds's *The Triumphs of Gods Revenge*. A good overview of anthologies of Protestant judgement literature is given in Walsham, *Providence*, 67–69.
77. Walsham, *Providence*, 111.
78. Peters, *Print Culture*, 72n.
79. Pullin, "Female Friends and the Transatlantic Quaker Community", 188.
80. Peters, *Print Culture*, 32.
81. Anon., *Mirabilis Annus*, 82.
82. The Quakers first published their "Peace Testimony" in 1661, following the abortive Fifth Monarchy rebellion of the same year. See Greaves, "Shattered Expectations", esp. 248–59. For the 1661 Fifth Monarchy rebellion see Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men*, ch. 9.
83. Burrough, *Memorable Works*, 97–98.
84. Peters, "The Quakers and the Politics of the Army", 14.
85. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men*, 35.
86. Fox, *A Warning*; Farnworth, *A Brief Discovery*; Greene, *A Trumpet Sounded out of Zion*.
87. Smith, *The Vision of Humphrey Smith*.
- 88 Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, 228.
89. This has also been observed by Knott in "Joseph Besse and the Quaker Culture of Suffering", 135.
90. Penney ed. *Record of the Sufferings of Quakers in Cornwall*, 83–85.
91. YM/MfS/GBS/8/2 Great Book of Sufferings, Dorset to Lancashire, 1695–1700, fol. 174.
92. LRSF, Reynolds MS Box 1 3/4 fols. 19–21.
93. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, ch. 11; Neufeld, *The Civil Wars After 1660*; Scott, *England's Troubles*, ch. 7; Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, ch.7.
94. Davies, *Quakers in English Society*, ch. 12.
- 95 The transformation of Quakerism as it entered its second and third generations and the impact that this had on the movement's publications has been well documented in the historiography of the movement. See Braithwaite, *Second Period*, chs. 4–7; Barbour, *The Quakers*, 234–56; Davies, *Quakers in English Society*, 70–2.
96. Braithwaite, *Second Period*, 279–81.
97. Cadbury ed., *George Fox's Book of Miracles*, 92. Details about the foundation and role of the Second Day Morning Meeting are given in O'Malley, "Defying the Powers and Tempering the Spirit", 72–88.
98. Moore, "Late Seventeenth-Century Quakerism and the Miraculous", 335.
99. It may even have prevented the publication of the lost *Book of Examples of Judgements Upon Persecutors*.
100. Davies, *The Quakers in English Society*; Dixon, "Quaker Communities in London"; Stevenson, "The Social Integration of Post-Restoration Dissenters, 1660–1725", 360–87; Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, ch. 6.
101. This has been explored by Dixon, in "Quaker Communities in London", esp. chs 6 and 7. Also Davies, *Quakers in English Society*, ch 14.
102. YM/M2 Yearly Meeting Minutes YM, 1694–1701, 9 June 1701, fol. 340.
103. Dandelion, "Guarded Domesticity", 97.
104. Cadbury ed. "Examples of Judgements upon Persecutors", 214.
105. LRSF, YM/M1 Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1668–1693, 23 May 1678, fol. 61; The first reference to recording judgements upon persecutors appears 18 May 1676, fols 29–30.
- 106
107. LRSF, YM/M1 Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1668–1693, 23 May 1678, fol. 61
108. Warborough [Oxfordshire] (not dated), Penney ed. *First Publishers of Truth*, 217.
109. YM/M2 Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1694–1701, 28 May 1694, fols 1 and 61. Also noted 15-17 May 1695, fol. 100 and 4 June 1696, fol. 127. 28 April 1694, fol. 2.
110. Penney ed., *First Publishers of Truth*, 127.
- 111 Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath*, 187
112. Hagglund, "Changes in Roles and Relationships", 138–39.

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- 113 Fox, *Journal*, Nickalls ed. 167.  
 114. Penney ed., *Record of the Sufferings of Quakers in Cornwall*, 56–57.  
 115. YM/MfS/GBS/8/2 *Great Book of Sufferings*, Dorset to Lancashire, 1695–1700, fols. 74–78.  
 116. Walsham, *Providence*, 76.  
 117. E.g. Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, 199–218.  
 118. Knott, “Joseph Besse and the Quaker Culture of Suffering”, 127.  
 119. Partially re-printed in Besse, *A Collection of Sufferings*, vol. 1, 70–72.  
 120. Besse, *A Collection of Sufferings*, vol. 1, 349–50.  
 121. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 98–110; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, ch. 22.

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