

George Fox's 'Book of Miracles'

Edited with an Introduction and notes by Henry J. Cadbury

Quakers United in Publications has reprinted George Fox's 'Book of Miracles'. This book became available for purchase in seventh month, 2000. It had long been out of print due to the 1948 and 1973 editions being of limited quantities. My interest in the 'Miracles' started with my Quaker upbringing.

I had heard about the miracles growing up in the U.S. and then later got a heavy tutelage on the subject in the 1960's from my English grandmother, Florence Rose Morgan. Granny was a Forester, in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, England. The Foresters retained an oral history of events going back to pre-Celtic times. The piece of oral history for The Friends was one that focused primarily on the 'Miracles'.

For me, George Fox was the man with the "Book of Miracles". It took me a long time during my early adult years to realize that for most Friends, 'The Book of Miracles' was virtually unknown. Considering that the book details over 150 recorded cures, it is clear that George Fox was involved in a healing ministry. Indeed, it was a requirement of the times, (the mid 1600's), that Fox be a 'Miracle Worker'. No religious leader worth his salt could be seriously entertained as 'publisher of truth' unless he also evinced miracles.

Jesus Christ had promised his followers that they would do even greater things than he did. By some accounts, one verse out of seven in the New Testament relates somehow to Jesus and his healing ministry. It is little wonder then that 17th century English Christians faced with the execution of their monarch and the rise of a host of new religions expected great things from those who professed to follow in Christ's footsteps. 'George Fox's Book of Miracles' was his attempt to satisfy both his critics and his followers that Quakerism was a true faith, one especially blessed by God.

George Fox also involved himself with facilitating cures for two rather prominent individuals. On his list of cures were those of Lady Elizabeth Claypole, (the favorite daughter of Oliver Cromwell who was then the ruler of all England, after the execution of Charles I) and the young Duke of Gloucester, (son of Prince George and the later, Queen Anne), who was at the time of the cure, the heir-apparent. Fox therefore covered both sides of the fence and placed Friends in a position of win-win depending on whether Parliament or the monarch was to hold sway in ruling England. Henry Cadbury has managed to piece together a whole series of such healings including many that Fox had listed in the extensive index to his 'Book of Miracles.'

The actual text of the 'Book of Miracles' is only 44 pages; the bulk of the book is Cadbury's lengthy 86 page Introduction and the brief but excellent forwards by Rufus Jones, Jim Pym and Paul Anderson. What we glean from the Introduction is well worth the reading. Not only does Cadbury place the Book of Miracles within its historical context, we also get a sense of why Fox wrote it and why it was never published as written, (fear of Friends being persecuted as 'witches').

We further learn from Prof. Cadbury's research, how important healing work was to George Fox and other early Friends. Fox is quoted about his desire to be a physician, (had the Lord not lead him otherwise). He therefore carried a physician's bag everywhere he went and collected herbs at the various parts of the world that he visited. Fox even left land to Friends in Philadelphia, a part of which was intended "for a garden, and to be planted with all sorts of physical plants, for lads and lasses to learn simples there, and the uses to convert them to –distill waters, oils, ointments, etc." (page 43)

According to Forest lore, George Fox was not the best healer in the bunch (which included the likes of the Penningtons, members of the Penn family, Samuel Hooton, James Nayler et al). No, despite his 'Book of Miracles,' Fox had to take a back seat to James Nayler. The Foresters maintained several facts: #1 James Nayler raised the dead, namely Dorcas Erbury, (Henry Cadbury has extensive documentation from court files detailing this event in the book). Fox never claimed such a feat himself; although some folks did maintain that his restoration of John Jay's neck was an example of raising the dead (pages 370, 371 of the 1694 edition of the *Journal*); #2. The conflict between George Fox and James Nayler was a product of the conflict over who was the greater healer with James having both more and greater healings to his credit; #3. Fox's 'Book of Miracles' was both an attempt to document his successes with an eye to diminishing the legacy of Nayler and #4. Most Friends were involved in healing work. The frequent Meetings for Sufferings being not only practical in terms of providing food, shelter, and other resources for those being persecuted and for their families; but also they were primarily a time of worship when Christ Jesus, (who had come to teach his people), might be prevailed upon for miracles.

This new edition of Henry J. Cadbury's George Fox's Book of Miracles will be a most welcome addition to Friend's libraries both public and private. It is a piece of Quaker history that has been largely ignored by most historians. It is also a part of our roots and a partial explanation why we experienced such phenomenal growth during our early years. George Fox and other early Friends were indeed miracle workers. I take Friends at their word and look forward to the day when contemporary Friends also see miracles as not only a part of our heritage but also as a possibility for today.