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Glines's "Undaunted Zeal: the letters of Margaret Fell" - Book Review

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BOOK REVIEWS

Glines, E.F., (ed.), *Undaunted Zeal: the letters of Margaret Fell*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2003, pp.vi + 510; ISBN 0 944350 64X Paper, \$35.00.

The letters, pamphlets and books by seventeenth century Quaker Margaret Fell have become a ready resource for scholars working in theology, religious and secular history, and women's studies. Here we have a sizeable collection of written material from a seventeenth century woman who wielded her own power and influence in numerous religious battles as she helped birth the Religious Society of Friends. As the wife of a judge and a Member of Parliament, Fell was wealthy and socially well positioned. After her meeting with George Fox and conversion to Quakerism, she was a guiding force at the center of the movement as it spread across England. In later years she was subjected to periods of imprisonment, eventually forfeiting her estate as penalty for her religious practices. Throughout this time Margaret Fell kept on writing, and a good portion of her letters and publications are extant. The problem has been that there is no definitive collection of her work. All of this changes with the publication of *Undaunted Zeal*. In this, Elsa Glines has given the scholarly world a gift of enduring value by creating what will long remain the definitive edition of the works of Margaret Fell.

Working with founding leader George Fox, whom she would later marry, Margaret Fell articulated a Quaker position on matters such as pacifism and women in ministry. The significance of this material has slowly become apparent to modern scholars, and in the past three decades she has found her way onto the scholarly landscape. A small portion of her work has been utilised to support a wide range of views on topics such as feminism, mysticism and Protestant spirituality. Because much of her work was previously unknown or difficult to access, these views have been developed using a relatively small sample of the Fell's overall contribution. The Glines edition is the first to contain all 164 known letters of Margaret Fell, and its publication raises the standard for scholars who draw upon the work of Fell in their academic contributions. The stated goals of this edition are to 'publish the letters so accurately and carefully that scholars will know that they have Margaret Fell's exact and complete words,' and 'to make the letters available to the general reader with an interest in going to the source and a willingness to do so' (xxi). As editor, Elsa Glines has succeeded admirably.

Glines is uniquely qualified for the editorial task she has so carefully undertaken, and the product of her efforts here is testimony both to her practised eye and meticulous methodology. Long a Quaker, her thorough knowledge of the Fell material and her career as a university librarian combine to provide a remarkable work, with carefully-reasoned editorial decisions that are clearly demarcated and evenly applied. The letters are arranged chronologically rather than topically, which allows the patient reader to gain a sense of both the breadth of her contributions and the direction of her thought as it developed

over time. The collection is supplemented with chronologies and maps, and each letter receives a summary introduction containing information about its content and audience. Each section of the book begins with a list of letters included and a brief outline of their historical context. Names appearing in more than one letter are cross-referenced within the text and biblical quotations are identified where possible.

The work is divided into three parts. The first, 'Margaret Fell and the Birth of a Movement', covers the period of 1652-58. This includes the earliest of her letters, and captures the fervor and excitement of the Quaker movement's early days. Of broadest interest here are her letters to the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, and early refutations of anti-Quaker publications. The second section, 'Margaret Fell During the Restoration', spans the period of 1659-68. This shows us the maturing movement, now called the Religious Society of Friends, as it developed under the weight of decimating persecution and responded to the restoration of the English monarchy under Charles II. In part three, 'Marriage to George Fox and Later Life', we see the final years 1669-1702. This is the smallest of the three groupings, and in some ways the most compelling. This gives us Margaret Fell at the end of her life, writing to a religious movement intent on forgetting her and the extremes of the first generation of Quakers.

So much in this volume is extraordinary. The work is so valuable, rich and readable, that one hesitates to ask for more. By the same token, the editor's introductory comments are often intriguing and insightful. Her remarkable command of the extant Fell material and her familiarity with secondary sources is evident, and one cannot help but wish Glines had inserted more of herself into the text. However, as with any good editor (or librarian) she allows the subject to rule the pages, keeping herself as unobtrusive and yet as helpful as possible. Margaret Fell is definitely centre stage in this work, and we are better off for it. As an editor, Glines has a deft touch, and the orderly character of the collection belies the Herculean labor the book represents. With this work now available, Fell should be able to secure her place among the significant religious figures of the seventeenth century. *Undaunted Zeal* is a significant scholarly contribution to a variety of disciplines, and every humanities library of worth would do well to add a copy to its collection. Readers in the area of Friends theology, Quaker studies, sociology of religion, and women's studies will find this special interest.

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