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Foreword in George Fox's 'Book of Miracles'

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Foreword

by Paul Anderson

Most people who are familiar with the writings of George Fox know either his *Journal* or his letters. Some will have heard of his *Book of Miracles*, but few will actually have seen a copy of it, as the first two printings of Cadbury's edition were quite small, and until now, copies are found primarily in library collections. As a great service to present readers, Quakers Uniting in Publications (QUIP) has produced a new edition in a form which will make the book far more accessible than it has ever been before. For this we are truly grateful!

In this remarkable piece, first published in 1947, Henry J. Cadbury has gathered an early index of miracles associated with the healing ministry of George Fox. Some external references have been made to it, but the present volume provides us with the most extensive representation of that earlier book's contents. While the original manuscript was lost, one can nonetheless get a rather complete sense of its contents by examining the index references themselves. In addition, Cadbury has gathered some of the related narratives and parallel passages in other writings by Fox, and these are included here, in this volume.

The present collection comes to us with no fewer than four introductory essays, which together are over twice as long as the *Book of Miracles* itself, even as amplified with extended notes by Cadbury. And yet, each of these essays provides an important and distinctive service to the reader. The extensive introduction by Cadbury describes the history of the reconstruction process, gives valuable background information, suggests possible reasons for the nonpublication of the book, and provides many helpful connections with the other contemporary and historical material. Cadbury's notes and inclusion of *Journal* parallels also provides an invaluable service, since most of the book itself remains missing. These additions in smaller

type provide the reader with a fairly good idea of what the original text might have been like in many places.

The essay by Rufus Jones does a very nice job of sketching the religious setting of the times for us, complete with a discussion of a variety of ways people thought about miracles in the prescientific era. He also, quite helpfully, assists members of the modern era appreciate the value of appeals to the miraculous without having to abandon commitments to the sorts of advances and perspectives the scientific era has produced. Jim Pym has written a fresh foreword for this new printing, and his essay approaches the content from a personal and spiritually-engaged perspective. He finds continuity not only between Fox and the ministry of Jesus, but also between Fox and the wondrous workings of God's healing Power at work in the world today. In this essay I hope to contribute an overview of what the indexed accounts suggest, and then to offer a few reflections about the work itself.

The reader should again be warned, however, that what we have here is not the complete *Book of Miracles*, but the index to such a book containing over 176 references to miracles or events in the ministry of George Fox. Many of these are doublets of the same event, and this explains why both Cadbury and Jones use the figure 150 as a more realistic quantifier of the accounts. These were once narrated more fully in the original draft, but such is no longer in existence. Despite the terseness of the indexed accounts, by looking over and considering the material here included, a remarkably large amount can be learned about the distinctive ministry of George Fox—a venture having remarkable implications for later generations!

- I. *The Conditions Touched by the Power and Presence of God.* When you look over the miracle indexes themselves, the following impressions emerge:
 - a. The most prolific description of those who received help is the general—they were “sick” or “not well.” No fewer than 47 times are these descriptors mentioned, either alone or with other illnesses. The general term “infirmity” is mentioned three times, while either “diseased” or “diseases” are mentioned twice. In the fuller texts and in at least ten briefer ones, sickness is mentioned along with other aspects of illness, such as

fever or ague, and it is likely that further definition would have accompanied many of the briefer references. The particular condition is totally unclear in at least 9 other passages, but the most common single reference is to people who were in some way ill. Characteristic of Fox's response to people's illness is that he was "moved" to pray for and/or lay his hands on the person, or to speak to the person prophetically regarding the Power and Presence of God.

- b. The most common symptom mentioned is "fever," which occurs at least 20 times. In 5 of these references fever is associated with "ague," which is mentioned a total of nine times. Ague would have been associated with severe chills and shivering, the sort of symptoms accompanying malaria (in tropical regions) or other infectious diseases. Fever receives definition as "spotted" once, and small pox is mentioned 5 times, while measles is mentioned once. A variety of conditions would have caused high fevers, not to mention infections and other communicable diseases. "Flux" is mentioned once (62d), possibly implying a child with dysentery. These would have been the sorts of common illnesses people were afflicted with in Fox's day.
- c. At least 13 times the condition of the sufferer is described as "distracted" suggesting emotional trauma or mental illness. In Fox's day this was a euphemistic way of describing severe depression, despondency, or even insanity. Once a person (Lady Claypoole, as described further in the *Journal*) was described as "sick and troubled in mind," and a woman at Enemessy (Enemessex), who was in a catatonic state (apparently sitting for nearly two months hardly speaking or minding anything, cf. *Journal*, 1673), is described twice as "moping" (21a and 70a). Fits, possession, being troubled, star-gazing, and convulsion are each mentioned once, and "weakness" of one sort or another is mentioned 4 times. Whether these conditions were primarily emotional, somatic, spiritual, or some combination is unclear, but it is clear that Fox believed the delivering Power of God extended to their conditions as well.
- d. At least 8 times lameness is mentioned (or implied by the mention of crutches), and twice people were described as simply bedridden. Some of these were repeated narrations of the

same person or event (55b with 65 a-b, and 35b with 55c), and other incapacitations mentioned several times include blindness or vision problems (5 times), headaches (4 times), childbirth (3 times), and ulcers (4 times). At least 8 people are described as either in the dying process or having died. Four times “King’s-evil” is mentioned (27a and 56g appear to be the same incident), which was especially associated with scrofula, a glandular swelling condition. As Cadbury documents so helpfully, it was believed that this and some other conditions could be healed by the afflicted person’s being touched by the king or queen, especially in England and France during this time, and this accounts for the colloquial name of the illness. Besides these multiple references, the following conditions are mentioned once or twice: broken in belly, dead palsy, deafness, a broken neck, a knee problem, a toothache, sore lips, a condition of being crooked and/or scabbed, an issue of blood, an arm problem, gout, a hand problem, a breast problem, and a (kidney?) stone. Obviously, these would have been the sorts of common illnesses and maladies faced by those of Fox’s day, and again, the significant factor was his belief that the healing Power of God extended to these conditions.

- e. A final category would have involved general or specific references to potential threats to Fox’s ministry. A servant with a sword is turned away on page 31b, victory over the tempter is narrated on page 76, and divine action against persecutors or those wishing to subvert the ministry of Friends is described at least 6 other times. Fox does not reflect here on the theological problems associated with perceiving a loving God to be the visitor of judgment and affliction upon fellow human beings, but it fits into the larger rubric of God’s thwarting the would-be thwarters of God’s healing/redeeming work in the world. This would have been especially relevant in accounting for the fact that those with far more political and forcible clout were unable finally to hold back the advance of the Friends movement. At no fewer than 5 other places, Fox is given vision from above to see the greater purposes of God despite besetting circumstances in the here and now. At the death of his mother, or of a child, Fox is at times granted a vision of the better plight

of the deceased and is also comforted with divine assurance that all will be well among those who loved the person. Even physical blindness is transcended by a new vision of wholeness and a new reality. From the perspective of Fox, these matters would likely have been seen as aspects of the ocean of light sweeping over an ocean of darkness.

II. *Narrated Results of God's Healing/Redeeming Work.* As well as the types of conditions addressed by the Power of God through Fox and early Friends, one can also make several inferences from the last few words in each of the indexed accounts. While some of these are less than clear, the accompanying details and results elicit the following observations.

- a. The first observation relates simply to the number of times a healing is mentioned as having happened. The afflicted person is mentioned as "recovered" or having gotten well at least 55 times, and we might infer many more references if the full texts were available. In some cases, the sick did recover and did not die (10a), and some healings took place "immediately." At another time, events happening as were predicted "according to his word" (31a) suggests the function of the True Prophet—one who has been truly sent by God, as outlined by Deuteronomy 18 and other biblical developments of the motif. In all, the outcomes were apparently crafted to show how the initial crisis mentioned has been overturned by the Power of God as an attestation to something like "a great miracle" (26c) confirming the authentic ministries of Fox and others.
- b. The agency involved is not merely human; rather, it is the Power of the Lord (14d, 51b, 75b), or God and his love (10b, 27b)), or God and his Truth (13b, 69a), which effects the wonder. This point is extremely important, as the wondrous deeds testify to what God is doing above all else. The account of James Nayler and the raising of Dorcas Erbury also highlights this emphasis clearly. On the other hand, human cooperation is evidenced at least 6 times by the mention of the work being done according to a person's faith. Such is reminiscent of the Synoptic Gospel narratives, where miracles are done in accordance with human belief. The story of Giles

Kendall (10a) is especially emphatic upon the effectual power of faith. Conversely, lack of human faith may come across as the supposed explanation for miracles not always happening as anticipated. The theme, “the Lord giveth and taketh” (57c) draws the faith of Job (1:21) into the setting where the result (in this case the child dying) is less than that which is hoped for. Likewise, the mention of someone being “contented in the Lord” or responding “cheerfully” may indicate trust in God’s sovereignty and work, even though the outcome of the event may remain unmentioned.

- c. At times the effect of the miracle is heightened, especially with reference to the audiences and the subject being healed. The astonishment of people is mentioned 3 times, the doctors were confounded (once), people were glad and rejoiced (once), a mother is made glad (once), persons praised God (twice), and at least 6 times the account is concluded with some form of doxology and the expression: “Amen.” These attestation reactions are common to miracle narratives, and again Fox apparently follows the pattern of the Synoptic Gospel accounts as they convey the wondrous reactions of those who witness the events. On the other hand, the mention of witnesses in 63b and the references to writing things down for later audiences (52d, 54–5) follows the pattern at the end of John’s Gospel in particular.
- d. Another result is that those who were healed or touched by the Power of God at times become servants of God or partners in the ministry of Friends. In this sense, the miracles serve an evangelistic function. Transforming experiences thus become something of a calling for one to become a steward of that which has been received. One person remained a good Friend (38b), while another became an honest Friend (42c). At another place, one becomes “serviceable to the Truth” (46), and at still another a person rises “to refresh us” in keeping with (as Cadbury rightly points out) the mother-in-law of Simon Peter after she was healed in Mark 1. This aspect of the results of the miracles connects the intrinsic value of the miraculous event with its larger impact on the spreading of the Everlasting Gospel. In that sense, the function of the miracles is

seen to be evangelistic every bit as much as it is seen to be restorative.

- e. Finally, aspects of theological reflection come through in Fox's comments on the glorification of God through these events. Not only are the healed and their witnesses portrayed as giving thanks and praise to God, but the narrator also makes such statements explicitly. Accompanying the aforementioned doxological statements, the narrator explains the value of an event being to the glory or honor of God 5 times, and declares something like "praised be the Lord," or "blessed be God," at least 7 times. And, the divine source of the wonders is the One who is worthy of all praise and glory for ever and evermore (9). What is conspicuous about such reflections is that God is understood to be glorified regardless of the outcome—whether the child dies or lives, for instance. Again, such a response reflects trust in the sovereignty and sufficiency of God's work, and it suggests the conviction that the larger purpose of all healing/redeeming work is the glorifying of God and the furthering of God's work in the world. To this end, the miracles are viewed by the narrator as successfully fulfilling their function.

III. *Reflections.* While the statements in the indexes are very brief, they nonetheless contribute a remarkably full perspective on the place of miracles in Fox's ministry, and with the accompaniment of the other *Journal* accounts several reflections emerge.

- a. The miracles of George Fox must be considered as central aspects of his understanding regarding what the Power and Presence of God were doing in the world. Most of these are obviously references to cures and healings, but the larger category is one of general adversity (including life's hardships, sorrows, and persecutions) which is either overcome or endured with divine empowerment. One also sees in Fox's responses to events a strong faith in God and an attitude of thanksgiving accompanied by the desire for God to receive glory through whatever the outcome of a situation may have been. All of this betrays an underlying current of faith and an abiding belief that the ministry of Christ and the Apostles continues for later generations. Cadbury and Jones document clearly these expect-

tations as characteristic of the times, but when considered together, one gains a new perspective on the ways Fox himself understood his own ministry.

- b. This collection also causes us to reconsider the early Friends movement and the distinctive contribution of George Fox within it. In these narratives as well as those added by Cadbury one gets a sense of the reality with which God's working in the world was experienced by early Friends. Rufus Jones rightly suggests that these accounts may make us change our thinking about the sort of ministry Fox had. Rather than seeing Fox as primarily a prophetic voice speaking out against societal ills and injustice, or as a charismatic challenger of institutionalized religion, or as a visionary who had special access to divine leadings, one must reconsider his ministry as growing out of transforming encounter with the Power and Presence of God. Perhaps this is what William Penn referred to when he described Fox as one excelling in prayer in his preface to Fox's *Journal*:

But above all he excelled in prayer. The inwardness and the weight of his spirit, the reverence and solemnity of his address and behaviour, and the fewness and fullness of his words, have often struck even strangers with admiration, as they used to reach others with consolation. The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his in prayer. And truly it was a testimony that he knew and lived nearer to the Lord than other men; for they that know him most will see most reason to approach him with reverence and fear.

This is the sort of reality portrayed in the biblical accounts of Jesus and the Apostles, and the sort of impact aspired to by many of the revivalist and healing movements emerging over the last two or three centuries. In fact, one could do fruitful research connecting the beginnings of Wesleyan, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Vineyard and other movements to the ministries of Fox and other Friends who later followed in his wake, and these connections have often gone unnoticed. While the social impact of Friends on the world is well documented by historians, if one considers the numbers of people whose lives have

been touched by the Power of God working through Friends (and through others who have been touched because of those workings) the impact of Fox and other Friends becomes far larger than we might have thought. It also alters our criteria for measuring success. Rather than measure it in organizational or statistical terms, the query becomes one related to how well we are doing at living in—and out of—the life-changing Power and Presence of God. That query is a radical one indeed!

- c. A further reflection relates to possible reasons the *Book of Miracles* was never finalized and circulated. Cadbury and Jones rightly point out the controversial nature of miracle-appeals in the 17th century, as well as Ellwood's modesty and reluctance to include ostentatious material, but these were not necessarily the only factors involved in the collection's failure to be published. In addition to these problems, the index betrays at least two or three other matters which may explain, at least in part, the fact of the book's nonpublished status.

First, the index reflects problematic repetition, and this must have been an obstacle to the work's finalization. There are as many as two dozen places where the same account seems to be narrated more than once, and seeking to reconstruct the actual progression of events and consolidating parallel scenarios, where appropriate, would have been a difficult task in and of itself. While this would have been the case also with the *Journal*, the episodic character of the miracle narrations would have made them more difficult to locate within a chronological progression.

A second possibility is the fact that as many of the events are included in the *Journal* and other writings of Fox, it may have been felt that these accounts were somewhat redundant. The need for a narration of miracles would have certainly been lessened in the light of the fuller *Journal* produced by Ellwood in 1694.

A third possibility may reflect less of a decision not to publish the *Book of Miracles* but more neutrally a simple prioritizing of other works to be published first. As all editors and authors know, the decision to publish one piece may preempt or even displace other worthy projects, and such is not neces-

- sarily a negative reflection on the pieces left unfinished. As well as the plausible hypotheses of Jones and Cadbury, these practical realities and less pejorative inferences also alert us to possible factors in the nonfinalization of the *Book of Miracles*.
- d. So how does one approach this book? My recommendation is to start with an overview of the indexed accounts themselves. Get a sense of the layout of the material and read some of the narratives to get a feel for the accounts. Then come back and read the introductions in order to become aware of some of the historical background and some of the interpretive issues involved. Next, read the fuller accounts themselves and dabble to your heart's content in the rich notes added by Cadbury. Finally, you might pick up a copy of Fox's *Journal* and read again, or for the first time, about his provocative ministry. Or, just jump in to this new edition and read from start to finish. You really can't go wrong.

What sort of reactions will reading this book evoke? You be the judge. As well as to clarify significant spiritual aspects of the ministry of George Fox and early Friends, these accounts also become patterns for later generations, alerting us to the reality of Christ's healing Presence and redemptive Power—at work in the world and in our lives—even beyond what we outwardly see. When that happens, these narratives cease to be accounts of what has happened in the past, but they become the stuff of spiritual vision and social concern for new generations. At the very least they open us to the possibility that if the Power of the Lord is indeed over all, beyond what we'd imagined, we might feel ourselves called into partnership in this healing and redemptive work. This may be the greatest wonder of all!