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"On Quakers, Medicine, and Property: The Autobiography of Mary Pennington" - Book Review

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On Quakers, Medicine and Property: The Autobiography of Mary Pennington (1624–1682). Ed. (Cambridge, MA: Rhwymbooks, 2000), pp. ix + 61. \$14. ISBN 188929814X

This is a new edition, with a new title, of Mary Pennington's autobiographical writings. They are full of lively detail concerning the religious and material life of a well-to-do seventeenth century family, at first Puritan and then Quaker. Mary, the wife of Isaac Pennington, probably wrote the first part some time between 1660 and 1665. She added further notes and in 1680, after Isaac's death, brought it up-to-date and appended a letter to her grandson telling him the story of his grandfather, her first husband Sir William Springett. A copy of the earlier sections, made by her eldest son John, is included in the Pennington manuscripts in the library of Friends House, London. A copy dated 1755 is said to have been taken from 'the original manuscript' of the youngest Pennington son, Edward, and hidden for forty years in a wall in the house of William Penn, who was Mary's son-in-law. This is also in Friends House Library. I am grateful to David Booy for up-to-date information on the texts.

A version of the manuscripts was published in London in 1821, and a slightly different text in Philadelphia in 1848. In 1911 the 1821 text was reissued by Norman Penney under the title *Experiences in the Life of Mary Pennington (written by herself)*, with an historical introduction, explanatory notes and bibliographies of both manuscript and printed sources, as well as an abstract of Mary's will. This edition was reprinted in 1992 by the Friends Historical Society, London, edited by Gill Skidmore with an additional preface and notes, and with the bibliographies updated. The textual variations were noted but not investigated.

The Rhwymbooks edition is poorly researched. It purports to be an unabridged reprint of the 1821 text, but there are errors and omissions, mostly respecting the descriptive details of William Springett's deathbed, and with the Quaker 'thou' replaced by 'you'. The editors imply that the 1821 version corresponds exactly with the 1755 manuscript, which is not the case. They are evidently unaware of the 1992 reprint, stating that the manuscript was last printed in 1911. Their notes are mostly less ample than Penney's and some are inaccurate, failing to identify persons who were known to Penney. Their introduction has some useful background information, but also faults. Firstly, Mary's second husband is incorrectly entitled 'Sir Isaac'. Then, it is stated that the manuscript hidden for forty years was the original, rather than Edward Pennington's copy as indicated. It is implied that the contents of the document were meanwhile unknown, although John Pennington had his own copy of part of it. Finally, it is suggested that the manuscript was hidden for fear of persecution, whereas Quakers rarely had insuperable problems in publishing their books, and by 1680 were employing a regular printer. Why the manuscript was hidden is not known, but Edward was thirteen at the time, and maybe had a private hidey-hole.

Buy the Penney/Skidmore edition, not the inferior offering that is the subject of the present review. But remember that the text is not established.

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