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HENRY CADBURY, THE PEACE TESTIMONY, AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

JAMES KRIPPNER AND DAVID HARRINGTON WATT

How did twentieth-century Friends understand the nature of the so-called Peace Testimony? That is, of course, a very large question. In this brief essay we hope to shed what is admittedly a very thin sliver of light on it by exploring the life and thought of Henry Cadbury (1884-1973). The essay is divided into four sections. The first presents a brief overview of Cadbury's life. The second looks at Cadbury's general approach to peace. The third explores how it was that Cadbury's strenuous opposition to the First World War led to his being forced to resign from the faculty of a Quaker school in suburban Philadelphia: Haverford College. The fourth draws some comparisons between the form that the Quaker Peace Testimony took in the years 1656-1723 and the form that it took in the twentieth-century.

I

During his lifetime, Cadbury was one of the most prominent Quaker scholars in the world. He received his AB from Haverford in 1903 and his PhD from Harvard in 1914. Over the course of a long and distinguished academic career, Cadbury taught at Earlham College, Haverford College, the Andover Theological Seminary, Bryn Mawr College, and the Harvard Divinity School. He made significant contributions to scholars' understanding of both the Christian scriptures and the history of the Religious Society of Friends.

Cadbury did not, however, live his life in an ivory tower. He poured an amazing amount of energy into working on behalf of peace. Cadbury played a major role in the creation of the American Friends Service Committee and served as its chairman between 1928 and 1934 and again between 1944 and 1960. In 1947 when the AFSC—along with the Friends Service Council—was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, it was Cadbury who flew to Oslo to accept the award.

From time to time, Cadbury made a point of drawing attention to things that the AFSC and other Quaker organizations had accomplished. But Cadbury was, as a general rule, quite careful to avoid overstating what Quakers had been able to achieve. He did not want to exaggerate the success they had experienced while attempting to resist what he called "the hydra-headed monster of militarism."[1] Cadbury was painfully aware of the fact that Quakers had not come close to creating the peaceful world for which they longed. In the final years of his life, Cadbury sometimes suggested that living in a society that was as militaristic as the modern United States placed Quakers in situations that were painful and contradictory.[2]

Cadbury's efforts to promote the cause of peace were sometimes costly. Those efforts almost certainly played a role in precipitating the depression that Cadbury experienced during the Second World War. (The depression was quite debilitating. In an attempt to overcome it, Cadbury received electroshock therapy.)[3] During the First World War, Cadbury's outspoken support of peace and denunciation of militarism cost him his job. (More on that later).

II

It would be a mistake to assume that Cadbury's devotion to pacifism was anchored in a certitude that God wants all human beings to embrace the cause of peace. Cadbury was not, in fact, absolutely certain that there is a God. Cadbury was not a committed atheist. But neither was he a committed theist. Cadbury publicly declared that he had never had an experience that he was willing to interpret as mystical. That is not the sort of declaration that Rufus Jones (who was Cadbury's colleague, friend, and brother-in-law) would ever have made.[4]

Cadbury was, of course, a lifelong Christian, and he held the Christian scriptures in high regard. But he did not believe that the Christian scriptures are the inerrant Word of God, and he did not try to use Biblical proof texts to argue that God commands all Christians to adopt non-violence.[5]

Cadbury's pacifism was connected to a disinclination to take the claims of nation-states at face value. Cadbury was a fierce critic of military drafts and of loyalty oaths. He expressed admiration for those Quakers (including at least one member of his immediate family) who refused to pay war taxes.[6] Cadbury believed that wars fought by

nation-states "[are] not and [have] not been and will not be justified, on either practical or moral grounds."[7]

Cadbury's understanding of the Peace Testimony was capacious and radical. For him, adhering to that testimony ought to involve a great deal more than simply refusing to support the wars fought by nation-states. Cadbury viewed *all* forms of coercion—even ostensibly non-violent ones—with great suspicion. In the early 1920s, Cadbury argued that labor strikes were immoral because they were too coercive.[8] In the mid-1930s, Cadbury asserted that calls for boycotting Nazi Germany had to be rejected on similar grounds.[9]

Cadbury's pacifism was sometimes expressed in ways that struck others as impolite, uncivil, and offensive. Cadbury could be a very blunt man. In 1947 he said "today there are millions of men in nearly every great nation who have taken part in war and they still believe that that war, or their part in it, was justified. As long as they hold that view they seem to me to be a risk against world peace." Such men (presumably including those that had helped defeat Nazi Germany) were, Cadbury implied, suffering from a dangerous delusion.[10] In 1934, Cadbury advised a group of American Jews that they ought not to hate Hitler. Jews should rather, Cadbury said, strive to cultivate a spirit of goodwill toward Hitler and all other Nazis. (Quite understandably, the Jews to whom Cadbury was speaking took offence. It wasn't at all clear to them that a Christian ought to be telling Jews whom they should or should not hate.)[11]

III

As we have already suggested, the ardor with which Cadbury expressed his opposition to the First World War got him into a great deal of trouble at Haverford College. On October 7, 1918, Cadbury, on Haverford letterhead, wrote a letter to the newspaper the *Philadelphia Ledger*. The letter was published on October 12, 1918. Cadbury wrote in response to media coverage opposing German efforts to negotiate an armistice that fell short of total victory for the Allies opposing Germany. He employed admittedly passionate prose that many would find impolite, uncivil, and offensive.

> Sir—As a Christian and Patriotic American may I raise one cry of protest in your columns against the orgy of hate in which the American press and public indulges on the receipt of peace

> overtures from the enemy. Whatever the immediate result of the present German request for an armistice, the spirit of implacable hatred and revenge exhibited by many persons in this country indicates that it is our nation which is the greatest obstacle to a clean peace and the least worthy of it. Never in the period of his greatest arrogance and success did the German Kaiser and Junkers utter more heathen and bloodthirsty sentiments than appear throughout our newspapers today.[12]

The letter continues for some length, contrasting the war-weariness of the European population to the "insane hysteria" of people in the United States. Cadbury then concludes prophetically, arguing

> Surely it behooves us at this hour, when not retaliation for the past but assurances of a safer and saner international fellowship is the world's need, distinguishing justice and mercy from blind revenge, to keep ourselves in the mood of moderation and fair play. A peace on other terms will be no peace at all, but the curse of the future. [13]

He also made a number of public statements against the war. For example, at a gathering of Quakers held at Haverford College on August 20, 1917, as United States involvement in World War I escalated, Cadbury responded to a ruling requiring conscientious objectors to serve as non-combatants by stating

> Apparently they do not understand that our opposition to war is real—That we object not merely to fighting, but equally to helping others to fight. I know you, and know you won't participate in war in any form.[14]

Cadbury's attempt to "speak from the heart" in opposition to World War I generated unexpectedly fierce opposition, especially after the publication of what his opponents termed his "orgy of hate" letter.

"Haverford Men Flay Cadbury" screamed the headline of the *Evening Public Ledger* on October 16, 1918.[15] According to the article, Theodore J. Grayson, a lawyer and alumnus of the College, was "leading the charge."[16] Between the publication of Cadbury's letter on October 12 and November 1, 1918, a series of events played out revealing the contours of this particular controversy. Most significantly, Cadbury had to contend with the possible legal implications of what some considered treason during wartime. According to the October 18, 1918 *Philadelphia Inquirer* Cadbury appeared before the United States District Attorney Francis Fisher Kane "while protest meetings

were being held both in this city and at the College."[17] At this meeting, Cadbury expressed regret that "his letter should have been interpreted in the manner in which it was."[18] Cadbury stated

> I feel deep regret that my letter was of such a form as to be construed as an attack on either the administration or the whole people of the United States. I had no such intention, nor did I intend to condone the deeds of Germany. My only purpose was to protest, as President Wilson has repeatedly done, against the expression of unreasoning hate on the part of any of my countrymen.[19]

Cadbury's explanation and measured tone was sufficient for the District Attorney, who stated "In view of Professor Cadbury's Statement to me, I am convinced of his entire loyalty as an American citizen."[20] The *Philadelphia Inquirer* article, revealing disappointment that Cadbury was "not retracting one word," concluded by noting that "Dr. Cadbury, who is a short, thin, anemic looking man about 35 years old, walked hurriedly out of the District Attorney's office after the conference."[21]

In response to a question from a *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter concerning the controversy on campus, President of Haverford College Board of Managers Asa Wing commented in a manner that with the benefit of hindsight seems naively dismissive.

> I understand that a letter has been drawn up by certain members of the alumni. I do not know who prepared it. An active little band of the alumni has been agitating the matter. I think District Attorney Kane has arrived at the right solution. I regard his letter as a true statement of the facts.[22]

Cadbury's opponents would not be so easily placated. In spite of the District Attorney's findings the *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted that "Every effort will be made within the next forty-eight hours to oust from the faculty of Haverford College Dr. Henry Joel Cadbury, professor of Biblical History at the institution, as a result of his 'orgy of hate' letter."[23] In addition to recognizing the District Attorney's acceptance of Cadbury's explanation and refusal to file charges, the article quoted John C. Winston, a member of the Alumni Association, who said that "about fifty prominent members have requested the Board of Trustees to demand Cadbury's resignation." Apparently the request followed a meeting at the University Club attended by many prominent alumni, among them William Draper Lewis, C.C. Morris, Henry Cope and Theodore J. Grayson.[24] It is not possible to

determine all the participants' views on this matter. Nevertheless, it is clear that District Attorney Kane's statement did not serve to defuse the situation.

As the controversy progressed Asa Wing was forced to temper his earlier public statement. Regretfully, he noted "I am afraid his usefulness at Haverford is at an end. Professor Cadbury has been repudiated by members of the Haverford Faculty, by alumni of the college, and by the greater number of its undergraduates for his 'orgy of hate' letter."[25] Though it is not possible to determine the opinion of everyone involved in these matters, or how they might have changed over time, Cadbury also came under less than honorable attack from some unnamed faculty colleagues. On October 21, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported: "The letter of Dr. Cadbury followed, according to members of the faculty, his repeated refusals to subscribe to Liberty Bonds, or to consider in any but a destructive light the efforts and sacrifices of the American people to establish justice in its larger measure throughout the world."[26] A letter censuring Cadbury, written by Professor William Sawtelle of the Chemistry Department, and a petition by students demanding Cadbury's removal organized by Student Council President Thomas McConnell, were delivered to President William Wistar Comfort.[27]

The conflict continued to receive extensive coverage in Philadelphia newspapers. An emergency series of Board of Managers' meetings held throughout the final days of October, 1918 at times "came as near bitterness as Quaker traditions permitted."[28] Though the Board as a whole expressed a consensus disapproval of Cadbury's letter, two factions coalesced, one calling for immediate dismissal and the other defending academic freedom. Interestingly, the faction referred to by the press as "the conservative element," headed by former President of Haverford College Isaac Sharpless and Asa S. Wing, stood firm in defense of academic freedom, in spite of Wing's earlier ominous comment that "I am afraid his usefulness at Haverford is at an end."[29] As the *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted: "The progressive element, composed almost wholly of young men, repudiates wholly the professor's utterance that the United States 'is not worthy of peace.'"[30] In the end, the relentless media scrutiny, public pressure and escalating campus politics took its toll on "conservatives" and "progressives" alike.

On October 22, 1918, Henry J. Cadbury voluntarily submitted his letter of resignation to the Board of Managers.[31] However, on

October 23, 1918, the Board was unable to come to consensus on accepting it. While the Board expressed its "emphatic disapproval" of Cadbury's letter, it ultimately deferred action on accepting Cadbury's resignation to a committee consisting of "Dr. Isaac Sharpless, former President of the College; Dr. William Wistar Comfort, his successor, its present head; J. Stogdell Stokes, secretary to the Board of Managers; J. Henry Scattergood and Morris E. Leeds."[32] On November 1, 1918 the *Philadelphia Ledger* reported that "Professor Henry J. Cadbury, Haverford College, has been given leave of absence for the rest of the academic year by the Board of Managers."[33] It is not clear when or if this committee met again. Cadbury remained on paid administrative leave until the Spring of 1919, when he accepted new employment in a different institution and the Board of Managers formally accepted his resignation from the faculty.

IV

There were, of course, a great many differences between Cadbury's approach to the Peace Testimony and the approaches adopted by Friends in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But there were some similarities, too. Cadbury discovered that trying to live out the Peace Testimony involved him in all sorts of complexities. Early Friends made that same discovery. As Meredith Weddle pointed out in her brilliant analysis of seventeenth century Quakers, "pacifism is complicated because violence itself is complicated."[34]

Cadbury was living in a time when Friends strongly disagreed with one another about what exactly it meant to adhere to the Peace Testimony. (After all, a good many of the men who played a part in forcing Cadbury off of Haverford's faculty were highly-respected members of the Religious Society of Friends). But controversies over the Peace Testimony were not, of course, an exclusively modern phenomenon. Such controversies date back to the earliest days of Quakerism.

And there was nothing new, either, about the acerbity with which Cadbury expressed his views on war and peace. Some of the language with which early Friends expressed themselves when talking about those issues was far more bellicose than the language Cadbury used in his letter to the *Philadelphia Ledger*. His bellicosity is part of what connects Cadbury to his seventeenth-century spiritual ancestors.

When he spoke about war and peace, Cadbury could be both extremely irenic *and* shockingly outspoken. That is part of what makes him so fascinating.[35]

ENDNOTES

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