

Reviews

Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel. Valentine Cunningham. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975. Pp. 311, £7.50.

This is the first major treatment of Nonconformity in the nineteenth century novel since A. L. Drummond's *The Churches in English Fiction* (1950) and M. M. Maison's *Search your Soul, Eustace* (1961). The opening chapters promise well: the author first explains his intention to strike a happy balance between the type of "purist" literary criticism which despises research into the cultural background of fiction and the Marxist hypothesis which views the novel as a passive reflector of the economic and social conditions of the times. He next explores the varieties of Victorian Protestant Dissent in all their complexity, recites their grievances and places them firmly in their urban and rural setting. This too is well done: only occasionally does a particular designation ("Free Churchmen of Scotland"—p. 107) grate on the ears. He then asks the all-important question: why do the majority of novelists, particularly Dickens, treat Dissent so unfairly, create such hideous Nonconformist stereotypes, heap abuse on chapels and chapel-goers alike? His solutions are the conventional ones: the novelists were writing for an audience of Anglicans (or perhaps of worldlings—p. 214) which liked to have its prejudices confirmed in this way; they were following where Newman, Pugin and the Tractarians on the one hand and the Arnolds and the Broad-churchmen on the other both led; they were relying on a tradition of anti-Dissenting and particularly anti-Methodist polemic which goes back into the eighteenth century and beyond. But the arguments are presented all the more authoritatively because of the author's vast researches and grasp of his source materials.

When he comes to his individual writers Mr. Cunningham has likewise mined and quarried extensively—not least in the past volumes of this journal. His book, we quickly sense, is a major reference work for any enquirer who wishes to know about the Methodist background of George Eliot and the real Methodist people on whom her fictional characters are based, about the Brontes' Methodist or Mrs. Gaskell's Unitarian environment, about Dickens' Dissenting contacts, Mrs. Oliphant's Presbyterianism or William Hale White's family links with Bedford Old (later Bunyan) Meeting.

The Baptist reader will be particularly interested in the treatment of Kingsley's Alton Locke (modelled, we are told, on Thomas Cooper—pp. 109, 280), in Patrick Bronte's pamphlet war with a Baptist pastor (p. 121), in the very full discussion of the relationship between the Rev. Francis Franklin of Cow Lane, Coventry, and Rufus Lyon

in George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (pp. 171f.), in the young Dickens' connections with William Giles and the Chatham Baptists (p. 192), in London's Seventh Day Baptist Chapel and the Little Bethel in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (p. 197), in Sir S. M. Peto's appearance in the fiction of both Mrs. Oliphant and Thomas Hardy (p. 201) and in Hardy's sympathetic handling of a Baptist community and its distinctive rite in *A Laodicean* (passim).

It is when he attempts to synthesise his findings into literary criticism proper that Mr. Cunningham begins to falter. For all his intense sympathy with Dissent he is very anxious to hurry George Eliot out of it and into a "Feuerbachian humanism", with Comtist and Darwinian elements, wholly "sociological" and secular—which totally obscures the fact that her last book, *Daniel Deronda*, with its unique representation of Evil and its hero's tortuous search for Identity, is one of the most hauntingly religious novels in English literature. Again Unitarianism is suggested by the author as the essential element in the background to Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, in the unfavourable reception it received within her circle of friends and in the effects which this rejection had on her development as a writer. The parable of Dives and Lazarus was however an equally essential undergirding of the whole enterprise: Mrs. Gaskell understood the meaning and the message. Her readers could not or would not respond.

Mrs. Oliphant is upbraided for her standoffish objectivity, her insensitivity to her characters' emotional lives, defects conspicuous in her treatment of Dissent—but this is to ignore the fact that it was precisely this remoteness which enabled her to pen her little religious masterpiece, *A Beleagured City* (1880). And in one instance the author argues against himself: Hale White is censured for not realising how deeply late Victorian political Dissenters drew their inspiration from seventeenth century Puritanism, yet when George Eliot creates in Rufus Lyon a character who is old Puritan and modern Liberationist rolled into one, she is blamed for creating a "Janus-like," hopelessly composite fictional type, based on a conflation of two living persons who belong to two different epochs of thought and feeling.

It is however the style in which it is written which is the chief demerit of this book. The author's prose ranges from the infelicitous to the execrable: malcontents appear as "discontents", predictably as "expectably", abounded as "glutted". Solecisms are everywhere and a horde of horrid words lurches through these pages: calqued, irradiical, ideolect, reification, replicated, stereotypical, grotesquerie, complexly, and many more. All this is enough to guarantee that the author in choosing the title for his work was giving a hostage to fortune; its critics will savage it on grounds of style alone and disregard its undoubted merits. They will have a point: it is still possible, even in this era of post-classical education, for an Oxford don, as John Wain has recently shown in his biography of Dr. John-

son, to write vigorous, contemporary prose without resorting to this kind of verbiage. Mr. Cunningham, a Fellow of Corpus Christi, should learn to do likewise.

IAN SELLERS.

New England in the English Nation 1689-1713. Philip S. Haffenden. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1974. Pp. xiii, 326, 1 map. £5.75.

This careful, interesting and specialist work studies the relationship between England and New England (primarily Massachusetts) from the Glorious Revolution to the Peace of Utrecht. It describes the history of Massachusetts during this period in the context of the colony's fears of the domination of the world by militant Catholicism through the France of Louis XIV, her sufferings at the hands of French and Indian raiders, the tensions between her and her sister colonies and the relationship, always uneasy and sometimes downright hostile, with the home Establishment in England.

Of all the colonies, writes Dr. Haffenden, Massachusetts was the most sophisticated politically, the most enterprising economically and the most articulate. It is certainly interesting to learn that Boston, at that time a far larger trading centre than New York, built fifty ships to English orders in 1709. Meanwhile, the old theocratic elite, symbolised by the persons of the Mather family, felt itself under increasing pressure from within the colony. This pressure came from various other sectarian Christian groups (including the Anglicans and the Quakers), from liberal theologians among its own ministers and from the growing process of secularisation which threatened the colony's identity as one above all others dedicated to the service of God.

This meant that while the Glorious Revolution for a short while helped Massachusetts to feel more at one with old England than she had done for almost a generation, all did not long remain well. For example, even their fellow Dissenters, the Presbyterians and Independents in England, tended to be very critical of Massachusetts for her failure to allow full religious freedom. Meanwhile, the large majority of Englishmen were deeply suspicious of the ideals of the colony of the "saints". The governing class remembered their kinship with the rebels who had executed Charles I, the merchants saw them as rivals in trade always willing to evade the laws made to protect the mother country's commerce, and ordinary people saw them as religious bigots, witch hunters and, the final word of condemnation from the irreligious, hypocrites.

It is this aspect of the book which makes it especially interesting to the historian of Dissent and to readers of the *Baptist Quarterly*. For contemporary English views of New England reflect the popular view of evangelical Dissent from the tory magistrates under Charles II to the caricatures provided by such writers as Charles Dickens two

centuries later. Oddly, while Dr. Haffenden notes that Daniel Defoe was one of a very few sympathetic writers about New England, he does not point out that Defoe was one of the few popular writers who was also friendly to organised Dissent at home. Oddly too, while the influence of the dark image of Dissent is often present in his pages and, by his own account, plays a significant part in the story, Dr. Haffenden's index finds a place for "Anglican Church" but not for "Congregationalists", "Dissent", "Independents", "Presbyterians" or "Quakers". It is also noteworthy that the author can speak of "increasing Quaker strength" (p. 163) in Massachusetts during 1706 at a period when they had begun to decline in old England.

Taken all in all, this is a most interesting multi-dimensional study of a society both under great pressure and bursting with vigour which illuminates many of the strains between the mother country and one of her colonies two generations before the American Revolution.

B. R. WHITE.

Discovering Chapels and Meeting Houses. David Barton. Aylesbury: Shire Publications. 1975. Pp. 64. 50p.

This most attractive little book is a welcome addition to the familiar "Discovering" series. It offers exceptional value even for so useful a series of booklets. The author, David Barton, is a Quaker whose interest in Nonconformist buildings was stimulated by the many small village chapels he discovered in Derbyshire, where he is a librarian.

An amazing amount of information is compressed into the small space allotted. The introductory chapter gives a more than adequate account of the historical origins and differing requirements of the dissenting denominations. Examples of early and later buildings are described in some detail, and many others are named. Quaker meeting-houses and chapels in Wales are each given separate treatment. The twenty-five photographic illustrations, like the text, cover the whole range from early 17th century to 19th century buildings. The Bibliography covers most of the admittedly scanty material available for further reading. A useful Gazetteer, arranged by counties, gives the main examples for each area, although there are a few surprising omissions here, perhaps owing to shortage of space. Unlike many small handbooks, this one has an adequate index.

The attractive cover design by Ron Shaddock of a small white-washed chapel makes the book easily recognisable, and is on a par with the high quality of the whole production, furnishing a pleasant and useful little book for reference.

BESSIE L. SELLWOOD.