

PURITANISM IN MID 17TH-CENTURY SUSSEX: SAMUEL JEAKE THE ELDER OF RYE

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INTRODUCTION

At the outbreak of the English Civil War the Sussex town of Rye was quick to declare its allegiance to the parliamentary side; the town also took advantage of the unprecedented religious freedom of the 1640s to adopt Puritan forms of church worship. A central figure in both the religious and civil life of the town in the 1640s and 1650s was Samuel Jeake; early in that period Jeake formed his religious opinions and in the next 20 years he became a leading member of a group of devout Puritans in the town. At the same time he discharged a number of administrative responsibilities, one of which was the office of town clerk which he occupied for much of the 1650s. Previous accounts of Samuel Jeake's life have been given in a few articles in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, in Holloway's work on Rye and, more recently, in the work of Bagley and, extensively, of Fletcher.¹ This article aims to reveal more fully the person of Samuel Jeake in the 1640s and 1650s, and especially his religious views, using Jeake's letter-book as the main source. The letters written to and by Samuel Jeake and assembled in his letter-book provide valuable information on Jeake; from these letters it can be seen how he compared with his Puritan contemporaries around the country in his denominational allegiance, his personal spiritual beliefs and his courtship of and marriage to Frances Hartredge. Such an examination reveals some of the difficulties of interpreting religious history in this period, especially the limitations of evidence and the problems of terminology.

The letter-book of Samuel Jeake comprises some 200 pages of letters, most of which deal with religious subjects. The first 60 pages are made up of letters to and from Jeake's mother, Anne, who died in 1639, but the rest of the collection relates to Jeake himself. Jeake's first letters were written in 1640 and most of the letters in the collection were written in the next 20 years. Some of the letters after 1640 are originals but most are copies, written in the same hand. Although the handwriting of Samuel Jeake and his son, also called Samuel, is similar, the compiler of the letter-book was Samuel Jeake senior. Since most of the letters relate to spiritual matters it seems that Jeake's primary purpose was to record his most important religious experiences and to show how his beliefs pervaded his life. The collection would have had a didactic purpose; in it the reader could see the workings of God in Jeake's life. It is likely that the letter-book was compiled for his son's benefit, for the ownership inscription and binding are those of the younger Jeake.² Samuel senior may have assembled the collection as a gift for his son, partly as a spiritual autobiography and partly as a work of spiritual instruction; many of the problems alluded to in the letters were typical of the difficulties which Puritans faced in their religious lives.

Evidently Jeake was highly selective in his choice of letters. He did not record all of his correspondence on religious matters but chose those letters which he felt were most important, and perhaps those representative of others written in a similar vein. This conscious

selectivity endows each letter with particular importance and makes it possible to ascertain what Jeake thought were the most significant features of his spiritual life. However, Jeake's selection process also implies incompleteness. Much was assumed and went unsaid. He recorded only the significant events, leaving aside the ordinary; so a rounded assessment of his religious views is impossible. It is also likely that the record Jeake left behind is rather idealized; he may not have recorded letters which would tarnish the picture he wanted to portray – that of an obedient man devoted to, and receiving favour from, an all-powerful and loving God. Nevertheless, as long as these limitations are kept in mind, Jeake's letter-book can provide a valuable insight into the thoughts and actions of a devoted Puritan.

The definition of the word 'Puritan' has been a matter of controversy among historians. The variety of views that have been described as 'Puritan', and the ensuing problem of definition, have led Kearney to say that 'Puritanism is nearer a flavour, a tone of voice, a loose set of not always consistent assumptions than a precise and unambiguous concept which can be sharply defined.'³ Nevertheless, most Puritans did share certain characteristics, as contemporaries noticed. Henry Burton described them as 'men of strict life and precise opinions, which cannot be hated for anything but their singularity in zeal and piety.'⁴ These 'hotter sort of Protestants,' as an Elizabethan pamphleteer described them,⁵ sought to purify the Church of papal influence and effect a complete reformation in England.⁶ The Word of God as revealed in the Bible was the most important guide for a Puritan: it was believed to show God's promise of a life-giving faith for those destined to be among the elect. Most Puritans had some sort of a predestinarian interpretation of the Bible, whereby the elect were destined to enjoy eternal bliss and the unregenerate were damned to eternal perdition. Finally, most Puritans also held some sort of belief in the millennium and the end of the world.

The term 'Puritan' is useful as a description of a particular religious outlook as long as the variety contained within it is appreciated. The various positions which Puritans adopted can be described by terms like Presbyterian, Independent, Separatist and Baptist, but while there is a need among historians to classify the diverse Puritan stances, care has to be taken that the terminology used does not bring a pattern and structure to a situation that was in fact more vague and confused.

JEAKE'S DENOMINATIONAL ALLEGIANCE

Samuel Jeake's denominational allegiance is hard to classify and a variety of terms have been used by a number of writers to describe his position. Holloway, writing in 1847, called him a 'Presbyterian,' as did Inderwick 50 years or so later.⁷ T. W. W. Smart was more uncertain in 1861; he called Jeake a Puritan but said 'his religious views varied from time to time.'⁸ The *Dictionary of National Biography* is equally unspecific, stating that 'Samuel Jeake was a nonconformist who adhered to none of the great denominations of his time.'⁹ More recently, Fletcher has asserted that by the mid 1640s Jeake 'had formed his own baptist congregation in Rye.'¹⁰ It is disputable whether Samuel Jeake can be ranged with any particular group within the spectrum of Puritan belief. The letters provide hints of his position but nothing can be concluded with certainty.

Two incidents that occurred in 1641, when he was only 17, show that Jeake was already moving towards the Independent viewpoint of wanting to restrict the sacraments and church membership to the elect, who were to remain separate from the parish churches. The Independents of the 1640s felt that the Church of England was essentially antichristian and that the 'godly reformation' in England could only be achieved by gathering believers into congregations of 'visible saints'; these local congregations would be independent of any higher

ecclesiastical authority.¹¹ Jeake recalled in his letter-book how his 'tender years and apprehensions took offence' when the minister of St. Mary's church in Rye used the words 'dear sister' in the burial of a papist, Mrs. Ann Threele. He also objected when a woman, dangerously ill after bearing an illegitimate child, 'was prayed for in the public congregation.' Jeake's view, as he wrote to John Coulton, was that the church should have nothing to do with such ungodly people. Ann Threele 'was an infidel being a papist, for they deny that faith of us Christians and cleave to the covenant of works which is now abrogated.' Papists should be excluded because 'Anti-christian's and Christ's followers have no relation nor affinity to or with one another.'

Jeake was equally intolerant towards 'the fornicator.' She should not have been prayed for publicly, Jeake argued, for such action would countenance her immorality which she had not renounced. He would only agree to public prayer for people who 'first confess their sins and humble themselves openly.' This the woman had not done. Her 'vile words' made it clear that 'she had no love nor liking to the ways of God.'¹² Thus Jeake already came close to the requirement of the Independents that a man could only be admitted to communion if he showed 'some experimental evidences of the work of grace upon his soul.'¹³ Unlike the Presbyterians, who felt that the ungodly masses should be kept within the visible church, the Independents claimed that they could distinguish between the elect and the damned; it is clear from Jeake's position on this issue that he was not, as Holloway thought, a Presbyterian.

In 1641 and 1642 Jeake's exclusionist views were sharpened in discussions with his friends and in his reading of works printed in London by Independents like Henry Burton; in the catalogue of Jeake's library at Rye Museum there are four works by Burton,¹⁴ and Jeake was probably well in tune with the religious debates that took place in the capital. The next

controversy in which Jeake was involved indicated how his exclusionist feelings were tending towards a rejection of infant baptism. Many radical Independents, known as Separatists, progressed to a Baptist position in the 1640s, arguing that complete separation from the Church of England demanded a renunciation of infant baptism and rebaptism as an adult into the gathered church. In 1642 Jeake, John Coulton and 'others disliking the national way' incurred the displeasure of the new Rye minister, John Beaton, by provocatively walking out of the church service 'when the children of visible unbelievers were baptised.' After arguing with Beaton face to face and achieving nothing, the group decided to put their arguments on paper and send them to him. They set out to prove three 'propositions':

First, that the churches instituted by the Apostles in the primitive times are only particular churches and not national.

Secondly, that the faithful only and their seed being in church communion are the proper subjects of baptism.

Thirdly, that it is high sacrilege and a profanation of the name of God and his Ordinances for either church or officer to dispense baptism upon any other subject save only the faithful and their seed.

Extensive quotations from the Bible were used to back up their arguments. The New Testament, they said, 'teaches no less that none but visible saints were the subjects either of church membership or of baptism.' 'A verbal profession of Christ (when otherwise visibly rotten in life) is not sufficient', they argued, for church membership because 'visible wicked men, whatever in words they profess, makes a church a synagogue of Satan, nay Babylon, an habitation of devils and a cage of all foul spirits.' It was from such men that Jeake wanted the godly to separate. He hoped that Beaton would come round to this viewpoint and enforce such a separation in the parish church. If he did not,

the logical progression was for Jeake and his friends to separate themselves from Beaton's church.

The paper also demanded that baptism be restricted to those who had first repented, and their children. However, in a postscript to the letter Jeake added that 'some of us afterward seeing further into the point of baptism laid by the baptism of all infants as well as those of the immediate, as more remote believing parents, and only annexed baptism to believers making profession of their faith.'¹⁵

The two letters written by Jeake to Coulton and Beaton reveal the major incidents that led Jeake to a Separatist stance. However, the letters of this period only show what initiated his Separatist tendencies; they give neither a plain description of the extent of his Separatism, nor a clear picture of his relations with the parish church. This lack of evidence makes it difficult to state Jeake's position with certainty.

On the surface it may appear that Jeake was a Baptist. His statement that he wanted to confine 'baptism to believers making profession of their faith' seems to confirm this. However, as Tolmie has observed, 'a conviction that only believers' baptism was warranted by the New Testament did not necessarily lead to the creation of baptist institutions.'¹⁶ Tolmie cites the example of Col. John Hutchinson, governor of Nottingham, and his wife Lucy who did not baptize the child they had in 1647 but who also did not undergo rebaptism themselves. This practice, Tolmie suggests, 'was perhaps widespread among Independent congregations of the 1640s' and there is certainly no evidence to suggest that Samuel Jeake was ever rebaptized.

The case often made against implementing believers' baptism was that only those with an extraordinary commission, like John the Baptist, could baptize, and ordinary Christians could not. The letter included by Jeake in his collection from Frances Cornewell 'to such as deny dipping into water in the name of the Lord Jesus to be in use now' is instructive in this context. Cornewell was the minister responsible

for bringing Jeake's future brother-in-law Christopher Blackwood to the Baptist standpoint. He preached a sermon at Cranbrook in Kent in 1644 which Blackwood attended, and after studying the issue of infant baptism for himself Blackwood was converted.¹⁷ Cornewell's position in his letter, probably written in 1646, was unequivocal: he besought men 'to believe, repent and be baptised', claiming that 'dipping into water is a lively representation of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.' For this reason the practice should be continued, despite the claims of those who wanted to restrict baptizing only to those with special commissions.¹⁸

Jeake gives no indication of why he decided to record the letter. He may have kept it because he agreed with what was written in it, or because he wanted to show the views of those who disagreed with him. He records no letter of reply, which Cornewell urged any dissenters to write, so perhaps Jeake agreed, or at least did not vehemently disagree, with the point that Cornewell was making. This does not rule out the possibility that Cornewell was writing to the group of Separatists in Rye who rejected infant baptism but who did not accept adult baptism. If this was the case then it would be erroneous to call Jeake a Baptist, as Fletcher has done.

It is also debatable whether Jeake was at the head of a conventicle in Rye at this time. Fletcher and Smart both think that he was.¹⁹ Both probably took their evidence from Holloway, who cannot always be trusted. Certainly Jeake headed a conventicle in Rye in Charles II's reign, and for this he was persecuted, but there is no direct evidence from the letters that he held such a position in the 1640s and 1650s. The nearest indication that there was such a group in Rye comes from Blackwood's letter to the Mayor and Jurats in 1647. Blackwood was protesting at the imprisonment of Nicholas Woodman who had been 'praying in the presence of some of the saints met at Mr. Miller's house.' There are indications in this letter that Jeake and his godly circle had

completely dissociated themselves from the parish church. Blackwood described them as 'dissenting brethren that cannot close with your [the Corporation's] worships' and said that if they attended the parish church they 'should deeply dissemble (their principles being such as they are).' Blackwood stated that the godly circle did not worship with the other citizens because 'if doctrines erroneous or destructive should be delivered' they had no opportunity to point out what they saw as the truth.²⁰

So at this time the people of Jeake's godly circle absented themselves from worship in the parish church. However, it is doubtful whether they formed an autonomous separate church. More probably, this is an extreme case of the semi-separatism that had been a characteristic of the Church of England since Elizabethan times. Semi-separatism, which has also been called 'quasi-separatism' and 'non-separating Congregationalism',²¹ was characterized by unofficial meetings for religious purposes outside regular parish worship. These groups lacked the essential conviction that they were churches, simply meeting for prayer and Bible study as a supplement to the weekly worship in the parish church. Semi-separatist groups were often the sources from which open separation might arise, but such meetings, complementing and not opposing the worship of the parish church, often provided the justification for non-separation: such voluntary and private religious activities were an attraction which endeared many to the established Church.²² It is difficult to decide whether Samuel Jeake and his godly friends took the step from semi-separatism to Separatism, or whether the voluntary forms of worship persuaded them to stay within the parish church. From Blackwood's letter it would seem that they absented themselves from worship in St. Mary's church. It is reasonable to assume that they held their own services independently, and it may also be true that Jeake was the minister or leader, but neither of these suppositions can be proved from direct evidence.

On the other hand, in the 1650s Jeake appears to have had considerable contact with the parish church. His marriage in 1651 was recorded in the parish register, so the ceremony may have been performed in St. Mary's church. Between 1653 and 1656 Jeake was elected registrar of births, deaths and marriages as recorded in the church register.²³ Holloway thought that this implied 'that the church was in Presbyterian hands' in this period. As further evidence of this he posited the fact that there is no record of the 'Presbyterians' having a place of worship of their own, but as Tolmie has shown most of the gathered churches of London met in private houses.²⁴ Despite this, and despite the misnomer, it is interesting that Jeake did become involved in the administration of the parish church. This may simply reflect the fact that the registration of marriages was now a responsibility of the civil authorities rather than the Church, but it is noteworthy that Jeake should accept such a post, for it implies some sympathy on his part for the parish church. His links with the actual ministry of the church were to become stronger when John Allin became minister from 1653 to 1662, and the two men maintained friendly relations.²⁵

So it seems that Jeake was separate from the parish church in the 1640s but became more involved with it in the 1650s. However, our categorization of 'non-separatism', 'semi-separatism' and 'Separatism' may bring structure to a situation that was in reality much more fluid. Jeake and his associates would not have thought in such rigid terms. Their relation to the parish church mattered far less to them than the quality of the minister. Since Elizabethan times the lives of the godly had revolved around the Sabbath when the whole day was taken up with religious exercises. If there was no acceptable preaching in the parish, the godly went elsewhere; the Elizabethans called this 'gadding' to sermons.²⁶ This casual and disorderly Separatism continued throughout the early 17th century. Collinson has noted how in this period the relation of the godly

group to the established church was 'untidy and ambiguous',²⁷ this was even more true of the 1640s and 1650s when no formal church structure existed. In such a situation the personality of the minister often determined whether the godly worshipped in the parish church.

Jeake had argued with John Beaton ever since the start of his ministry in 1642; not merely doctrinal but also personal differences between the two men fomented the division. When Jeake and his friends met Beaton to explain their position in 1642 the meeting produced only 'vain janglings' and no progress was made. Although the two parties agreed to 'walk in love' together, this does not seem to have happened. Jeake and his circle could not have stayed very close to their minister for they 'never had any answer' from him concerning the points they raised in their letter.²⁸ Four years later it seems the two sides were no closer together. Joseph Nichols, in a letter warning Jeake to 'take heed of pride, with which I hear you are mightily puffed up', urged him to 'love the word and the ordinances, and if you despise the minister, despise not the ordinances, but truly it is a sad thing to despise the ministers.'²⁹ Admittedly Nichols, being a stranger to Rye, did not know the intricacies of the position there, but it is interesting that the reports he received stressed the personal nature of Jeake's conflict with Beaton.

The departure of Beaton as minister at Rye in 1650 may have promoted Jeake's return to the parish church. Virtually nothing is known of Beaton's successor, Robert Russell, but his ministry did not last long and he was replaced in 1653 by Jeake's friend John Allin.³⁰ The attitude of Russell and Allin to Jeake and his circle was probably much more conciliatory than that of Beaton, and they may well have shared much the same views.

So the personality of the minister seems to have been a major factor in determining whether or not Jeake and his friends associated themselves with the parish church. This is

virtually the only solid conclusion about Jeake's denominational allegiance that can be drawn from the letters. The lack of direct evidence on Jeake's position reflects the fluidity of a situation in which changing personal relations were more important than predetermined theological positions. Jeake, and the people with whom he was accustomed to share midweek spiritual activities, drifted away from a church whose minister was not sympathetic to their desire to keep apart from ungodly elements. However, this group was ready to respect a man such as John Allin who was more like-minded. Jeake and his friends floated in and out of contact with the church, attracted by what they saw as positive elements and repelled by more undesirable features. This vagueness makes a categorization of Jeake's religious position difficult. His involvement with the parish church would seem to refute the suggestion that he had adopted a Baptist standpoint in the 1640s, for such a move would have meant total separation from the traditional church. Neither was he a Presbyterian, for he demanded the complete separation of the godly and the ungodly. It is easier to say what Jeake was not than what he was. Clearly he does not fit into a rigid denominational framework; this difficulty in pinning him down reflects the fluidity in the whole religious situation of the period, in which people's religious positions were constantly shifting.

JEAKE'S PERSONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

More important to Jeake than his theoretical standpoint in relation to the established Church was his personal relationship with God and especially the way in which he felt, like many other Puritans, that his own sin spoilt this relationship. The letter-book, as a religious collection, reveals many of the beliefs to which Jeake adhered. Many of the letters were written for spiritual encouragement, bolstering the faith of those in difficulty. Hence we are left

with several examples of the more problematic areas in Puritan thought, like the uncertainty of salvation and the reason for earthly afflictions. From his response to these problems it will be seen that Jeake held standard Puritan beliefs; this is demonstrated by his conventional views on eschatology.

The need for seclusion from ungodly influences, which led Jeake to Separatism, stemmed from a conviction that man was totally corrupt and sinful. In a letter to Mr. Harrison Jeake wrote: 'indeed it is epidemical to all the sons of Adam . . . to wander from this good way into many exorbitant and extravagant courses.'³¹ Man's total depravity demanded God's terrible judgement: 'we are all by nature the children of wrath', as Jeake told Coulton.³² The Christian, by God's grace, escaped this wrath. Aware of the terrible fate of the ungodly under the doctrine of predestination, it became crucial for Puritans to be assured that they were among the godly elect.

Doubts concerning election troubled many Puritans and it seems that Jeake was no exception. In 1644, when he was just 20 years old, he wrote a letter to John Coulton describing his spiritual problems. Jeake does not record this letter (perhaps he thought it would be incongruous among the other letters describing his spiritual development and showing his spiritual maturity), but from Coulton's reply Jeake's problems can be surmised. It seems that Jeake was in a spiritual depression and was on the point of giving up altogether. Coulton wrote: 'You speak of the setting of your sun at noon day. Woe is me to hear thee say so. It is the saddest news I have heard this many days.' Evidently Coulton was surprised and distressed to hear of the abrupt halt in his friend's spiritual progress. He sought to allay Jeake's doubts about religion: 'a Christian hath his ebbs and flowings, his winters and summers. Be not discouraged at all these.' As evidence that Jeake was numbered among the elect Coulton urged him to look at God's past involvement in his life: 'Cast up all thy former

comforts and experiences . . . look on all those sweet and gracious comforts you have had . . . what prayers God hath answered when we have met together at Mr. Marshall's.' Coulton was sure that Jeake was 'eminent in grace and godliness'; he sought to persuade Jeake of this fact too.³³ So a sure test for election in the eyes of many Puritans was to look for results, or 'fruits', of conversion.³⁴ It was these same fruits that Independents looked for in deciding whether or not to admit someone to church membership.

Jeake's spiritual crisis passed by and there is no evidence in any of the other letters that he ever entertained the same doubts again. His later letters exude the air of spiritual confidence and assurance; Jeake was certain that he would attain salvation. Jeake's confidence in his election was not dented, as far as we can see, by the fact that the signs of election could prove deceptive. One of Jeake's letters in 1645 concerns a Mr. Thomas Lucke whose 'life now gives the lie to his former profession' of godliness. Jeake recalled how Lucke was one 'who once seemed to have Christ in his countenance, grace in his very superficial actions.' At the time of the letter he 'appears quite the contrary, leaving his first love, revolting from the light of God into sin's dusky paths, scarce appearing in him the very leaves of profession.' Jeake lamented how 'his company is changed from saints to satanical satyrists, his courses from heavenly, holy, to hellish alehouse practices.' It is clear that Jeake was deeply disturbed by 'so sad and direful a tragedy': he visited Lucke twice to try and persuade him to return to a life of holiness but, it seems, to no avail.³⁵

The falling away of one of themselves must have perturbed the godly circle in Rye; all the saints must have had some doubts about their sainthood but Jeake, writing about Lucke only a year after expressing his doubts to Coulton, appears to be certain of his salvation. This conviction stayed with him for the rest of his life. In a letter of encouragement to 'a drooping

spirit' in 1647 he sought to reassure someone who felt that God no longer loved him. Following Coulton's example, Jeake told this doubter to see what God had done for him in the past.³⁶ In 1648 he was asked 'whether or no a soul being ingrafted into Christ may not fall from this grace yea or no?' Jeake was adamant that a true Christian could not fall away: 'The Father hears him [the Christian] alway, he is entered into rest, he is embraced with both hands and no one can pluck him out thence.' He was sure that 'God is our rock and his work is perfect. What shall remove one built on this foundation?'³⁷ So Jeake was confident that the believer could not be removed from his ordained position. Someone like Lucke may have not been a Christian at all, or else he may have been suffering the 'ebbs and flowings' which Coulton described. By 1647 Jeake's belief in his salvation was solid. Although no man could be absolutely certain of the truthfulness of his inner commitment, he could take comfort from the fact that a person's religious affiliation could be judged by the kind of life he lived. Godly men were expected to yield godly fruit; such fruit was their assurance of salvation.

Spiritual fruits were not the only evidence for election; perhaps more important was the suffering that the saints had to endure. The apparent paradox that worldly suffering brought spiritual benefit arose out of the doctrine of providence. As Thomas has shown, most protestants believed that nothing could happen in the world without God's permission, so that daily events showed God's purpose in their lives.³⁸ This was especially true of misfortune, which was interpreted as God's response to sin. Preachers and pamphleteers regarded national disasters, like famine and war, as originating in the moral failing of the people.³⁹

The sins of the individual also brought physical and spiritual afflictions from God. Faced by suffering, the believer had to look into himself for sin, repent and then repeat his sin no more.⁴⁰ As Frances Jeake was recovering from

illness in 1652, Christopher Blackwood wrote: 'let the use of this trial be to make you humble before the Lord and meek towards them with whom you do converse, and to search for the sin which hath caused the Lord to break in upon you.'⁴¹ Afflictions were messages from God, intended to provoke a more godly life in the believer. Charles Nichols wrote to Jeake that 'no passage' of God's 'all disposing and most wise providence should be suffered to slip without an advantageous issue to our souls.' All events of life were planned by God and were intended to benefit the believer. So the Puritan saw suffering as beneficial, the action of a loving God. Nichols was sure that 'afflictions are his love tokens and it is our duty to see it so.'⁴²

Worldly troubles were one of God's most important means of communication with man, calling believers to live godly lives.⁴³ Thus God afflicted his children for their own good: Jeake told Ralph Gibbon 'to rejoice that God dealeth with you as a son, for he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.'⁴⁴ This mentality led Jeake to tell his sister 'that so many afflictions as we meet with now in the world . . . become sweet, welcome and blessed to a believing soul, so worst things become best.'⁴⁵ Above all, sufferings showed God's interest in the Puritan's life; they pointed the way to salvation. Jeake told his sister to 'lift your head up to behold your redemption' in times of trouble.⁴⁶ Indeed, some measure of suffering was almost essential and an indication of God's interest in the person concerned.⁴⁷ So the hardships of life brought comfort to the believer. They showed God's continued concern in his life and, if the believer responded in the correct manner, they could bring him closer to salvation. Through the doctrine of providence Jeake followed, in all his letters, a typical Puritan interpretation of suffering that fortified his belief that God was on his side. In this respect, much of what Jeake and others wrote on suffering in the letter-book is representative of a standard Puritan mentality.

Similarly conventional were Jeake's apoca-

lyptic ideas: those concerning the end of the world. There had been a century-long apocalyptic tradition in the Church of England in which the Pope was identified with Antichrist and the Roman Catholic Church with Babylon.⁴⁸ Certainly Jeake fitted into this tradition calling the papists 'Antichristians' in his protest at the burial of Ann Threele.⁴⁹ Jeake and his circle also followed the interpretation of some Independents that the Civil War was a battle between Christ and Antichrist, with the royalists being identified as the forces of evil.⁵⁰ John Coulton, a chaplain in the parliamentary army, wrote: 'I do desire God to keep up my courage against God's enemies.' Describing a skirmish he wrote: 'the enemy attempted Bramber bridge . . . but our Colonel's horse welcomed them with drakes and muskets, sending some eight or nine men to Hell (I fear).'⁵¹

Although the war was seen in such terms, there is no clear apocalyptic interpretation of political events in Jeake's letters. Many Independents believed that the execution of Charles I in 1649 would inaugurate the coming millennium, that the end of the reign of the Stuarts would lead to the reign of King Jesus.⁵² The complete silence on this great matter in Jeake's letters may indicate that he held much milder apocalyptic views than many of his Independent contemporaries, being much more reluctant to give a date for the second coming of Christ.

There is a noticeable change in Jeake's apocalyptic beliefs around 1646. Before this time in his letters of encouragement to his godly friends Jeake mentions God's judgement and the joys of heaven, but he writes of these as if they were rather remote. Around 1646 his portrayal of the end of the world and Christ's second coming became more immediate. He urged Mr. Mason to 'wait on him still: his coming is prepared as the morning.' He wrote to Mrs. Martha Segliard: 'the time is approaching when these varieties [of human condition] shall be reversed into unity and God shall be all in all.' He looked forward to the 'joyful harvest' and the 'day of the Lord' and waited 'for the

Kingdom of God to come in power'.⁵³ In 1656, at a time when, according to Capp, hopes in the imminent millennium were fading,⁵⁴ Jeake described his apocalyptic vision with more urgency than ever before: 'The time is drawing near when we shall see the Father plainly, and know him as we are known of him . . . Behold it is even almost come and done, this is the day whereof he hath spoken, and the saints are many of them ready to cry out Amen.'⁵⁵ There is no indication in the letters of what brought about this increased apocalyptic expectation.

Despite this more immediate sense of the apocalypse, Jeake's hopes were still mild compared with the millennial excitement of the Fifth Monarchy Men in the 1650s. Such men would have been considered much too radical by Jeake and he made no contact with Walter Postlethwaite of Lewes, 'a moderate Fifth Monarchy Man.'⁵⁶ Jeake's ideas would have been coloured by the apocalyptic writings of his fellow Independents in London. Fletcher observes that Jeake was 'in touch with many of the intellectual movements of his day'; his library contained over 900 books, many of them written by his contemporaries.⁵⁷ It was easy and natural for him to take on the vocabulary of the apocalyptic works he read, but his adoption of contemporary ideas was limited. He used standard Puritan jargon in condemning papists as antichristians, and like many others looked forward to the end of the world, but he did not proceed much further, forbearing to describe political events in rigid millennial terms. The petition he and others wrote to Lord General Fairfax in 1648 acknowledged that Fairfax commanded the forces of good against the royalist evil, but Jeake did not develop this into fervent millenarian expectation, preferring instead to write about more practical matters like the corruption of committees and the burden of free quarter and taxation.⁵⁸

Jeake's letters reveal that many of his beliefs in personal religion accorded with conventional Puritan thought. He had a picture of sinful man and a wrathful God, who

bestowed love upon his children whilst afflicting his enemies with anger. Hence it was crucial for him to know that God was his Father. After some doubts early in his Christian life, he came to see God's interest in him, particularly in his religious experiences and his sufferings. In this and in his mild apocalyptic hopes he was typical of many. From the letter-book it is much easier to determine Jeake's views on these areas of personal belief than it is to assess his standpoint in relation to various denominational positions, for he was much more concerned with his spiritual life than with his theoretical denominational stance. Jeake's relations with God, his struggle against sin and his study of the Bible were far more important to him than outward ecclesiological matters.

JEAKE'S MARRIAGE

Another important relationship within Jeake's life was that with his wife. Jeake records 14 letters documenting his courtship of Frances Hartredge; there are also three letters written to and by his wife during their short marriage (Frances Jeake died of smallpox in 1654, after only three years of marriage). Jeake's decision to include so many letters of courtship in what was a spiritual collection indicates that he saw them as significant in religious terms. Indeed, the letters provide an unusual insight into the process whereby two devoted Puritans agreed to marry. The potential conflict of loyalty to God or to spouse that all Puritans faced in marriage also emerges from the letters.

The earliest letter in the series was clearly not the first love-letter that Jeake had written to Frances Hartredge; its inclusion in the letter-book serves as an example of others. In it Jeake wrote: 'I can no longer enjoy myself but in thee, for truly I have not beheld in all the world one so able to reciprocate my longings and retaliate that love which will never expire but with life.'⁵⁹ He was greatly in love with Frances and the feeling he judged to be mutual. Thus he was

deeply shocked and surprised when Frances wrote: 'I must . . . profess myself by this final negative a total dissenter' to his suit of marriage, which he had proposed during a personal visit. Furthermore, she would not give an explanation: 'to declare reasons of my total denial might be tedious to you and perhaps a ground of further trouble.' This bluntness perplexed Jeake. He could not believe that she did not want to marry, nor could he accept her blanket excuse that 'the most high who hath a sovereign influence upon my will bends it the clean contrary way from you.'⁶⁰ So, 'believing thyself can fancy me (or else I should desist) and not knowing what inferior reasons can counterpoise', Samuel tried to find out the root cause of her denial.⁶¹

The real reasons for Frances's rejection can be ascertained from the ensuing correspondence and from a list of five 'propositions' which Frances drew up as conditions for marriage once the matter had been resolved. Christopher Blackwood, who was in close contact with Frances, felt that she was held back by 'fear and doubt about a good title about the things to be possessed from you.'⁶² This was reflected in two of the five 'propositions' which related to property details in the marriage.

However, this easily resolved matter was clearly not the main stumbling-block. Two more of the five 'propositions' dealt with religion, and it is perhaps about these matters that Frances was unsure in 1650. It is clear that, like Jeake, Frances had strong religious views and she did not want him to interfere with them. Her 'propositions' started off with the statement 'I desire liberty of conscience.' She said she did not know 'the manner of your worship nor whether there be any thing that will offend my conscience therein' and asked permission to be absent 'if there should be such worship as my heart cannot close withall.'⁶³ So it was perhaps Jeake's reputation as a religious controversialist that put doubt in Frances's mind in 1650. She may have feared that his forthrightness in religious matters would force her to comprom-

ise her own strong beliefs and conform to his way of thinking.

As it turned out, she need not have worried. Jeake was quite prepared to grant her independence in spiritual matters. He knew that their religious beliefs hardly conflicted, for Frances was heavily influenced by Blackwood's views and Jeake had become aware of, and may himself have conformed to, these during Blackwood's curacy in Rye between 1632 and 1635. Frances's demand 'I desire liberty of conscience' smacked of Blackwood's influence. In 1644 he had written a tract opposed to 'compulsion of conscience and infant's baptism' in which he stated: 'we desire . . . liberty of conscience . . . to have liberty to worship the Lord according to that light revealed unto us.'⁶⁴ As well as influencing Frances, Blackwood shared Jeake's religious predilections. This is shown by Jeake's inclusion in his letter-book of Blackwood's protest to the Mayor and Jurats about the imprisonment of Nicholas Woodman.⁶⁵ Thus Jeake could be certain that Frances's beliefs corresponded closely to his own. His conviction that they were compatible on a religious as well as a personal level led him to continue his suit of marriage to Frances despite her rejection. He pursued the matter further, seeking Blackwood's advice, and 'receiving some encouragement I went again, and after a right understanding of things' Frances agreed to marry if her five 'propositions' were granted. The couple were finally married on 17 July 1651.⁶⁶

The ups and downs of Jeake's courtship show how important religious matters were to 17th-century Puritans in marriage. Personal attraction was not enough. The couple had to agree on matters of religious doctrine and each had to acknowledge the other's independence in spiritual affairs. They both had to be sure that the marriage was part of God's will. How they ascertained this is not clear from the letters. Samuel was certain that God intended them to marry despite all the providential signs to the contrary. Frances initially seems to have

believed that their marriage was not willed by God, but this may have been an excuse obscuring her more complex reasons for denial.

Blackwood's role in the proceedings was most important. He had influenced both people's religious beliefs, he was a personal friend to both of them and he mediated between them to resolve the issue. It was he who drew up a 'jointure' concerning a property arrangement to which both sides agreed,⁶⁷ and he may also have played a part in drawing up Frances's five 'propositions'.

Fletcher has called these demands 'a remarkable and unusual display of feminine individuality.'⁶⁸ Frances was not, however, demanding equality in marriage. Her 'propositions' were primarily intended to prevent her husband from forcing her to change her religious views: they gave her individuality in spiritual affairs only. Jeake duly gave his wife freedom of thought and action in religious matters, but 'she never took offence that I ever learned' to his style of worship.⁶⁹ The list of demands is unusual only in that it records in written form what would otherwise have been verbally agreed. There is nothing in them to suggest that Puritanism was giving rise to a new type of independence in marriage; at the end of the list Frances declared she would endeavour to be 'a loyal, loving and dutiful wife.'

This expression summed up the conventional attitude that women had, and were expected to have, towards their husbands. It has been suggested that the Puritan stress on the equality of spirits – Robert Bolton wrote 'souls have no sexes' – meant that women could take a far more independent course of action than was normal in 17th-century society. Walzer has asserted that the new Puritan view of women led to a new view of marriage, reflected in the voluntary contract and civil marriage ceremony operative between 1653 and 1657.⁷⁰ However, as Thomas has shown, equality remained spiritual only, and even radical sects were conservative in the organization and discipline of the family.⁷¹ Puritan writers like Richard

Baxter interpreted the 'sacred condition of equality' in marriage to be similarity of social status and age of marriage partners, not equality of status after marriage.⁷² Macfarlane has asserted that the 17th-century clergyman Ralph Josselin and his wife had a sort of 'joint-role relationship' in which 'all important decisions were jointly taken,' but there is no real evidence that Josselin consulted his wife on any important property transactions, or that he gave way to her judgement on any of his political or religious decisions.⁷³ Amongst the Puritans, as well as amongst their more worldly gentry contemporaries, the husband was the dominant partner and the wife was subordinate. As Lake has shown, Mrs. Jane Ratcliffe of Chester did not challenge conventional views concerning women's subordination to men.⁷⁴

The same was true of Frances Jeake. Just before her marriage, Blackwood gave her some advice for her married life: 'Endeavour to please him that shall be your husband and dwell with him with an amiable meekness and contentedness of mind and do not grieve his spirit with the least frowardness.'⁷⁵ Considering Blackwood's previous great influence on her life it is highly likely that Frances followed this advice to be obedient and deferential. Blackwood's ideas no doubt stemmed from his own marriage to Frances's sister; clearly even he, who was such an advocate of individual conscience, expected his wife to be subordinate.

So Puritanism did not change the woman's position in marriage; she was expected to follow the conventional social forms. What did change was the significance attached to these social forms.⁷⁶ By conforming to the conventional view of women and by displaying feminine virtues, Puritan women not only served their husbands but also served God. This is where they differed from their worldly contemporaries; Puritanism would ideally transform their obedience to their husbands into godliness. The Puritan woman's relations with God were more important than those with her husband. Blackwood urged Frances 'to stand fast in the faith

and to cleave unto God who will never fail you nor forsake you. If you cleave to him remember there are eternal joys with Christ far beyond all the married joys of this world.'⁷⁷ However, her relations with both man and maker should go together. After Frances had been ill Blackwood wrote: 'Let the use of this trial be to make you humble before the Lord and meek towards them with whom you do converse.' He told her to 'regard not any ornament so much as that of a meek spirit which beautifies in the sight of God.'⁷⁸ She was to be 'meek' towards both her husband and God.

This was an ideal which the Jeakes seem to have attained. In other Puritan marriages there was often a conflict between the wife's obedience to her husband and her obedience to the word of God as interpreted by her individual conscience. If the husband was not godly, or if he had different views on godliness, difficulties could arise. Jane Ratcliffe's husband does not seem to have been interested in religion, and she was able to create an area in her life where the views of her husband could not impinge. When the husband was zealous in religion and when he tried to influence his wife's views, divided loyalties could occur on the side of his wife.

Such was the main apprehension that Frances Hartredge faced in 1650. Other reasons for not marrying were less important but no less real, like concern over property matters and a wish to stay unmarried longer (at the age of 20 Frances may have felt that she was rather young to enter married life with its attendant risks of childbearing). Samuel and Frances were both strong-minded Puritans who prized their liberty of conscience. Considering the importance attached to it, Samuel's grant of spiritual independence to Frances when they eventually married was a major concession. In this way Frances was able to achieve an apparently successful compromise between the demands of God and the demands of the world. The role of the wife varied widely from marriage to marriage,⁷⁹ and this accommodation by Frances

was probably not typical. The Jeakes' marriage only lasted three years, perhaps not long enough for serious rifts to appear. The selection of letters by Jeake has perhaps left a rather idealized picture of an harmonious marriage. However, the evidence that does survive shows that religious compatibility was an important, and perhaps the most important, element in a successful Puritan marriage.

CONCLUSION

Samuel Jeake differed from many Puritans by having such a successful understanding with his wife, whereby she saw no conflict between her obedience to God and to her husband. Jeake was also untypical in seeming to have increased apocalyptic hopes in the 1650s. However, in other respects he was typical, for instance in his attitude to providence and suffering. Jeake's life in the 1640s and 1650s, as revealed in his letter-book, is valuable as a comparison with those of other Puritans, but perhaps its greatest value lies in the reminder that while many Puritans committed themselves to a particular form of church organization and

worship, there were others who did not. Instead they preferred to remain flexible as their attitudes shifted and altered according to circumstances. Historians have to beware of seeing denominational loyalty in a situation where there was none. Samuel Jeake was not devoted to a form of church worship but to God; his position is not consistent with any denominational category. He rejected infant baptism but did not proceed to adult baptism. He seems to have separated from his parish church in the 1640s but may have returned to it in the 1650s. This variability did not imply any lack of commitment but rather emphasized the priority given to purely spiritual considerations. By being so changeable Samuel Jeake was in a minority, but he may be representative of a number of other similarly placed Puritans. If so, the labels which historians use to describe Puritans should not always be regarded as all-embracing, for there were some whom Richard Baxter described as 'men of no faction, nor siding with any party, but owning that which was good in all.'⁸⁰ This description fits Jeake perfectly.

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Notes

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- ² My thanks are due to Dr. M. Hunter of Birkbeck College, London University, for this information.
- ³ H. F. Kearney, 'Puritanism and Science: The Problems of Definition', *Past and Present*, 31 (1965), 105.
- ⁴ C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964), 27.
- ⁵ P. Collinson, *The English Puritan Movement* (1967), 27.
- ⁶ J. S. McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England* (1976), 10.

- ⁷ Holloway, *History and Antiquities*, 551; F. A. Inderwick, 'Rye Under the Commonwealth', *Suss. Arch. Coll.* 39 (1894), 13.
- ⁸ *Suss. Arch. Coll.* 13, 66.
- ⁹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. Jeake.
- ¹⁰ *Studies in Sussex Church History*, 149.
- ¹¹ M. Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1 (1978), 94, 99; M. Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: the Separate Churches of London 1616–1649* (1977), 101.
- ¹² East Sussex Record Office, FRE 4223, no. 47 (Jeake to J. Coulton). (Later references to Jeake's letter-book are cited simply FRE 4223.)
- ¹³ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 154.
- ¹⁴ My thanks are due to Dr. Hunter for this information.
- ¹⁵ FRE 4223, nos. 49–52 (Jeake, Coulton and others to Mr. Beaton).
- ¹⁶ Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, 53.
- ¹⁷ C. Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist* (1644), Preface; T. W. W. Smart, 'Original Letters, Hitherto Unpublished, of the Rev. Christopher Blackwood',

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- ¹⁸ FRE 4223, no. 69 (F. Cornewell to Jeake).
- ¹⁹ Fletcher, *County Community*, 119; *Suss. Arch. Coll.* **13**, 60.
- ²⁰ FRE 4223, no. 70 (C. Blackwood to Mayor and Jurats of Rye).
- ²¹ Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, 28; G.F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints: the Congregational Way 1640–1660* (1957), 10.
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- ²⁶ P. Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (1983), 536.
- ²⁷ Collinson, *Godly People*, 546.
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- ³¹ FRE 4223, no. 48 (Jeake to Mr. Harrison).
- ³² FRE 4223, no. 47 (Jeake to Coulton).
- ³³ FRE 4223, no. 58 (Coulton to Jeake).
- ³⁴ McGee, *Godly Man*, 64.
- ³⁵ FRE 4223, no. 64 (Jeake to Mr. Watkins).
- ³⁶ FRE 4223, no. 71(a) (Jeake to 'a drooping spirit').
- ³⁷ FRE 4223, no. 74 (Jeake to T. Frisle).
- ³⁸ K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), 78–81.
- ³⁹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 84.
- ⁴⁰ McGee, *Godly Man*, 23, 37.
- ⁴¹ FRE 4223, no. 89 (Blackwood to Frances Jeake).
- ⁴² FRE 4223, no. 66 (C. Nichols to Jeake).
- ⁴³ McGee, *Godly Man*, 35.
- ⁴⁴ FRE 4223, no. 94(b) (Jeake to R. Gibbon).
- ⁴⁵ FRE 4223, no. 71(b) (Jeake to his sister).
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- ⁴⁸ P. Christianson, 'From Expectation to Militance: Reformers and Babylon in the First Two Years of the Long Parliament', *Jnl. of Ecclesiastical Hist.* **24**(3) (1973), 227.
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- ⁵¹ FRE 4223, nos. 55, 57 (Coulton to Jeake).
- ⁵² Watts, *The Dissenters*, 132.
- ⁵³ FRE 4223, nos. 72(b) (Jeake to H. Mason), 73 (Jeake to Mrs. M. Segliard).
- ⁵⁴ Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 45.
- ⁵⁵ FRE 4223, no. 96 (Jeake to R. Gibbon).
- ⁵⁶ Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 259.
- ⁵⁷ *Studies in Sussex Church History*, 148.
- ⁵⁸ FRE 4223, no. 76 (Jeake and others to Fairfax).
- ⁵⁹ FRE 4223, no. 77(a) (Jeake to F. Hartredge).
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- ⁶² FRE 4223, no. 79(b) (Blackwood to Jeake).
- ⁶³ FRE 4223, no. 81.
- ⁶⁴ Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist*.
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- ⁶⁷ FRE 4223, no. 84 (Blackwood to Hartredge).
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- ⁷⁴ P. Lake, 'Feminine Piety and Personal Potency: Mrs. Jane Ratcliffe and her Biographer' (unpublished TS.), 12. My thanks are due to Dr. Lake, of Royal Holloway and Bedford College, London University, for this information.
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