

**Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation.** Retha M. Warnicke. *Westport (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1983. Contributions in Women's Studies, Number 38.*

That those two intricately-related movements, the English Renaissance and Reformation, brought about a reassessment of the education of women is an historical commonplace familiar to even the most casual student of the period. Familiar too is the special role played by the Christian humanists early in Henry VIII's reign who vigorously urged that women receive an education in the classical languages to prepare them for their roles as wives and mothers. Some of the beneficiaries of this uneven, limited and short-lived stirring in English culture have long been familiar names. Recent biographical histories such as Pearl Hogrefe's *Tudor Women: Commoners and Queens* and *Women of Action in Tudor England* (see *Atlantis*, 3, no. 2 [1978], 180-183) have done much to keep certain names fresh in our minds, among the more familiar being Margaret More, Mary and Elizabeth Tudor, Lady Jane Grey, the three daughters of Protector Somerset, Mildred and Anne Cooke, Mary Sidney Herbert, Elizabeth Carey, and Lucy Harington Russell. A major weakness in the approach of Hogrefe and others, however, derived from the tendency to deal with such female figures almost as if they came from an identical historical context, whereas in reality they were the products of different generations and of very different religious, cultural and political backgrounds.

There is thus a need for caution in approaching the study of those relatively few women humanists and reformers who stand out so vividly against the dismal background of illiteracy of their female sisters, and this is well understood by Retha Warnicke, author of *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*. Indeed, in order to counter any threat of distorted chronological or contextual focus, she has adopted a generational model in the belief that any understanding of the role and status of educated women

in Tudor and Jacobean society must be preceded by an investigation into precisely who they were, to which generation they belonged, where and how they were educated, why they received their education, and what as a consequence they achieved. Furthermore, Warnicke believes that these matters must be studied in terms of each generation in relationship to corresponding developments in men's education.

Though such an approach may have some limitations of its own, it is not without good precedents and it certainly provides Warnicke with a more convincing chronological and contextual framework for her investigation than some of her predecessors. It leads her, for example, to the conclusion that if there was a "golden age" for women during the period, it was not during the first sixty years, as several scholars have argued, nor during the reign of Elizabeth, as others have contended, but in reality during the Jacobean era led by certain women born during the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign. As with Pearl Hogrefe's work, there is in Warnicke's book a distressing reliance upon a relatively limited number of biographical examples. This may indeed be due to there having been only a few women who ever received a classical education, but the general paucity of surviving evidence leaves one uneasy about accepting such a conclusion too readily; one remains continually aware throughout the book that there is still a great need for more detailed research into the lives and activities of Tudor women of all classes. Without further knowledge, we shall never be fully certain as to how much the women with an advanced classical or vernacular education were exceptions.

In *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*, four generations are selected for study: the pre-Reformation (this includes the More daughters, especially Margaret, Margaret Gigs, and Princess Mary); the Reformation (this includes Princess Elizabeth, her female Howard relatives, the Cooke sisters, and Mary Clarke

Basset); the mid-Elizabethan (this includes Anne Cecil and Arbella Stuart); and the Jacobean (this includes Elizabeth Cary, Lady Mary Wroth, Elizabeth Jane Weston, and Mary Ward). After an introductory chapter summarizing current knowledge about the status of women in late Medieval society, Warnicke examines the English humanist movement with, as one would expect, particular attention to Thomas More's views on family relationships and the education of women. She unfortunately relies heavily for prime evidence upon the *Utopia*, in which, she claims, More created "a setting he fantasized as nearly ideal", but such literal readings of More's subtle and ironic literary *tour de force* are notoriously open to question. One wishes that she had developed her argument in some other way, although her view that More's concept of the family as akin to the "restricted patriarchal nuclear family" defined by Lawrence Stone in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* is probably accurate. The dazzling product of More's ideas put into practice was, of course, his daughter Margaret, and Warnicke's discussion of her achievements leads to an entire chapter on "The Pre-Reformation Generation." A key conclusion of this chapter—one which may surprise some readers—is that prior to 1529, "undisputed evidence of Englishwomen schooled in the classics exists for only two families: More's with at least four young women and the king's with only Princess Mary."

There follow two chapters dealing with the issue of female succession between 1525 and 1587 and with religious persecution between 1533 and 1558. One wishes that there were some way that Warnicke's self-imposed task of working from within a defined historical context had not necessitated descents into the labyrinthian complexities that characterize both these issues, and it is with something like relief that one reaches her chapter on "The Reformation Generation." Yet, Warnicke's insistence upon first defining context proves justified for she is able to argue that partly due to the example of Henry VIII's

instruction of the royal children, partly due to the rival efforts of various powerful families to provide a suitable queen for the future King Edward (four families named a daughter in honour of Edward's mother), and partly due to the deeply-held Reformist beliefs of others, a small number of women were educated at this time in accordance with something approaching the favoured curriculum of the now discredited Catholic humanists. The education of all of these women, however, appears to have been controlled by men, and Warnicke is quite insistent that the roles of Catherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr (Henry VIII's first and last wives) have hitherto been greatly exaggerated by oversympathetic biographers.

Subsequent chapters deal with "The Mid-Elizabethan Generation" and "The Jacobean Generation." Apart from the sections on such expected figures as the Countess of Pembroke, Lady Elizabeth Falkland, and Lady Mary Wroth, there are a number of less well-known figures briefly brought to life in these pages, but what will especially catch the interest of readers, I suspect, is Warnicke's discussion of two matters. First, there is her consideration of whether the Protestant Reformation raised the social status of Englishwomen above their Catholic European counterparts, her tentative conclusion being that the legalization of marriage among the English Protestant clergy had "a far less positive impact on community attitudes toward Englishwomen than has previously been claimed." And secondly, there is her discussion of the situation of Catholic Englishwomen, among them Mary Ward, the 'Jesuitess', whose controversial views on education for women led her to found an undercover London branch of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (a foundation dedicated to the education of young girls) and a series of convent schools on the Continent designed to cater to rich and poor alike.

Retha Warnicke originated courses in women's history at Arizona State University, and her book

grew out of her subsequent teaching experiences. While one might wish that the lecturer's habit of detailed advance summaries for each section and a methodical collective summary at the conclusion of the book were less mechanical in character, one must admire the judicious manner in which, avoiding any extravagant claims, she has assessed the scholarly achievements and educational influence of women humanists and reformers. This is, I believe, the first book exclusively on this subject, but it will undoubtedly not be the last. Although the book offers an admirable introduction to her topic, the tentativeness of some of Warnicke's conclusions, her reminder that such studies are especially difficult because the records of the women in question have often "been selectively destroyed because they were deemed of little value", and her questioning of a number of previous historians' views are matters that are bound to challenge others to engage in further research, the results of which will owe much to the groundwork of Warnicke.

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**Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status.** Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Brackenridge. *Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983. Pp. 308.*

Religious activity in North America has shown a frequent tendency to ignore the border between Canada and the United States. Because that is so, and because research on the history of women and religion is still in its infancy in this country, there is reason to be doubly grateful for the quality and quantity of work on the subject published in the United States since the late 1960s. The authors of *Presbyterian Women in America* are clearly at home with this new historiography, and their work is a useful addition to it.

Boyd and Brackenridge are not the first scholars to look critically at American Presbyterian women's relations with their church, but theirs is the first comprehensive survey on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Their book contains a chapter on women's experience within the conservative southern wing of the denomination, but its authors' main concern is to describe the growth of organized women's work, the quest for full lay and clerical rights, and the development of church-based careers for women in the northern and largest strand of American Presbyterianism. While they write from what is generally a liberal feminist perspective, theirs is by no means a complacent account of steadily accumulating gains for the women of the church—their treatment of the crucial 1920's decade and their caution about recent 'victories' make this particularly clear. For anyone interested in women's role within North American Protestantism, their study will be of value simply for the wealth of information it provides. But beyond this, by locating the experiences and aspirations of a particular group of middle-class women firmly within their denomination's tradition and history, Boyd and Brackenridge help make it possible for modern feminists to understand and sympathize with their priorities.

The authors deal briefly with the period 1789-1870 when a combination of factors led Presbyterian churchmen to develop a rationale for sanctioning women's participation in religious activities outside the home. "Pious females" could be "ornamental and useful in the House of God", it was maintained, so long as they confined themselves to activities that were "an extension of their maternal and subordinate nature". During this period, a change took place from purely local, often non-sectarian activities with a variety of benevolent objectives, to larger, denominational organizations whose focus was increasingly missions-oriented and whose keynote phrase was "woman's work for woman." It was not until the 1870s, during what the authors call the "Church Woman's Decade", that there developed the regional and national missionary