NOTES AND QUERIES

Will Formularies

Bernard Capp

In recent issues of *LPS* and elsewhere, Dr Spufford and others have discussed wills as a source for popular religious belief, and have raised the question whether the scribes who wrote them relied on formularies for the religious preambles they used. No such documents have hitherto been identified, but in fact one specimen formula was readily available in the second half of the seventeenth century; indeed it probably ran to something around three-quarters of a million copies during that period. It is contained in successive editions of *Fly. An Almanacke*, one of a number of cheap, annual almanacs produced by the Company of Stationers. It first appeared in 1657 and contained specimen forms for bills, bonds, apprenticeship indentures and so on. From 1658 it included a regular section headed ‘A Copie of a Will’. Following an introduction this ran:

‘First, I bequeath my Soule into the Hands of Almighty God my Maker, hoping that through the Meritorious Death and Passion of Jesus Christ my onely Saviour and Redeemer to receive free pardon and forgiveness of all my sinnes; and as for my Body to bee buried in Christian buriall at the direction of my Executrix …’

It is not possible to identify the author of *Fly*, which was in any case a largely stereotyped compilation. It was published at London and later also Cambridge for the meridian of King’s Lynn and had a clear East Anglian leaning. A note in the edition for 1666 said that it was to be sold by Edward Bromley, bookseller in King’s Lynn. Surviving records of the Company of Stationers show that roughly 20,000 copies were sold *per annum*.

It will be interesting to see how often the formula was used by scribes in the late Stuart period. A few preliminary comments can be made on the basis of the wills discussed in Dr Spufford’s *Contrasting Communities*. Thus the *Fly* formula is identical to that apparently written by the Orwell scribe, John Martin, for Mary Barton (p.326), which was thus less ‘highly individual’ than Dr Spufford at first suggested. There is also a very close similarity between *Fly* and the will of a widow of Dry Drayton in 1611, whose soul was bequeathed to ‘Almighty God my Father trusting through the precious death and passion of Jesus Christ to have free forgiveness and pardon of all sins and be saved’ (p.328). It seems quite likely that the *Fly* formula represents not an original composition but merely the publication of a preamble which had circulated earlier, perhaps in a number of slightly varying forms.

The preamble in the *Fly* almanacs leaves many problems unanswered. As far as I know, no earlier almanacs contained a specimen will, and we thus still have no printed formula available in mass circulation before the mid-seventeenth century. One may speculate that village scribes owed less to any official formulary than to traditional forms used in the village and passed down through neighbours and kin, varied according to memory and taste. But it seems unlikely that any such genealogy of scribes can now be reconstructed.
Seasonality of Marriage in Estonia

H. Palli

The earliest parish registers to survive for rural Estonia date from the second half of the seventeenth century. The Estonian population was at this time entirely Lutheran so that there was only one register in every parish. The Estonian parishes were quite large: Ronuge (Raug in German) in south east Estonia had 7,500 inhabitants in 1685, Karuse (Karusen) in the west, 3,000, in fact most of the parishes had a population of between 2,000 and 4,000, though the smallest parish, Ruhnu (Runö), situated on an island, had only 290 inhabitants.

During these years marriages had distinct seasonal fluctuations. In most parishes ‘the marriage season’ began in November and continued for two or three months, during which some two thirds to three quarters of the annual marriages took place. Indeed, in the parish of Kaarma on the island of Saaremaa nearly five sixths of all marriages were celebrated during the month of November. As a consequence the number of marriages occurring in spring and summer was very low and these marriages were mostly confined to non-farmers (usually servants in manor houses) or to widower farmers remarrying. The upper class German population married more freely during the whole year. There are some exceptions to this general pattern, for example, in some parishes on the Estonian islands there was an additional marriage season in spring or summer.

In the eighteenth century, after the Great Northern War, the pattern remained generally the same, although some slight changes did take place. But in the nineteenth century the picture is rather different. The marriage season became longer and the difference between the months not so sharply defined as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If we calculate a seasonal marriage index, as suggested by M. Fleury and L. Henry for a group of parishes: Rongu (Ringen), Rannu (Randen), Noo (Nüggen) and Puhja (Kawelecht) in 1834-59, the peak months run from August till November with indices of 128, 152, 262 and 103. On the other hand in another group of parishes, Poitsamma (Oberahlten), Pilistvere (Pillistfer) and Kolga-Jaani (Klein St Johannis) in the period 1834-80 the marriage season continued from December until May with indices of 127, 115, 182, 161, 171, 141. In this latter group of parishes relatively few marriages were celebrated between June and November.

Differences in seasonality of marriage in Estonia and Western Europe stand out clearly if we compare marriages in Estonia with those in France. In Crulai in 1675-89 we find three marriage peaks: January-February (indices of 137 and 216), June-July (115 and 154) and November (228). The same three monthly peaks are to be found in twenty one parishes of Breptagne and Anjou in the eighteenth century but the differences between the month’s indices are greater than in Crulai (January and February: 209 and 395, July: 131 and November: 129).