

# **The Quaker Doctrine Of Inward Peace**

Howard H. Brinton



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR Howard Brinton has been a professor or lecturer at Guilford, Earlham, Mills, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr Colleges, and at Woodbrooke, one of the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham in England. He has also worked in Europe for the American Friends Service Committee and in Japan. From 1936 to 1950 he, with his wife, were Directors of Pendle Hill and from 1950 to 1952 he was Director. Now Director Emeritus, he continues to give classes each year on Quakerism and mysticism at Pendle Hill.

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## **I. Pressures Of Past Years And The Quaker Way Of Meeting Them**

We are all suffering from a sense of pressure. Feeling that our ancestors had ways of meeting the pressures of their day, we sometimes imagine that we might imitate their ways with profit. But it may be that their situation was so different from ours that we cannot imitate them. It is probable that we are living in an environment which exerts more pressure on us than was exerted by their environment upon them. The difference between four miles an hour in a buggy and forty miles an hour in an automobile measures in some degree the difference between the speed of living a century or more ago and the present speed. It is an astonishing fact that most of our labor saving devices have not saved us any labor. They have merely increased the number of things which we do. Because our friends can reach us easily on the telephone we are the helpless, obedient slaves of the telephone bell whose demands can no more be disobeyed than can the edict of a dictator. Because we can go anywhere easily and quickly, we go, believing that, as long as we are in motion, something is being accomplished.

But we cannot blame our increased restlessness entirely on the new tools which the restlessness uses to express itself. Some other force is obviously at work. We are busier than we used to be even when we use ancient tools and methods. Let us compare, for instance, the bulky volumes which contain the minutes of our present day Yearly Meetings with the slender pamphlets of a century ago or with the two or three handwritten pages of two centuries ago. Obviously the increase in Yearly Meeting activities is not entirely due to better tools to carry out these activities. For some reason we desire to be more active. In former Yearly Meetings far more time was given to spiritual admonitions and silent waiting. There were, for example, no standing

committees in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting until near the beginning of the nineteenth century and then, only two — the committee on Westtown School and the committee on Indians. The sense of pressure under which our present presiding clerks work during a Yearly Meeting was, so far as one can see, absent. There were long periods of waiting while minutes were being written. This example of an earlier absence of hurry might be duplicated in other fields such as home life and business. We are busier because we want to be busier. Why is this? Our gadgets could save us work if we wanted them to do so. Think how much back-breaking labor on the farm would have been saved by our ancestors if they had had our tools without our restlessness.

We sometimes hear a psychological explanation which undoubtedly contains some truth. Busyness, restlessness, the desire for activity is a form of escapism; we are trying to escape from ourselves. Not being able to face our own inner lives with all their stresses and strains, their disorder and chaos, we occupy ourselves as much as possible with what is outward. We do not like our own company so we feverishly seek the company of others. We compensate for inner weakness by seeking outward sources of strength. We are continuously in motion because we do not know what to do when we are still.

But this type of explanation, however true and useful, does not take us very far. In the first place the activist can and usually does reverse it, declaring that all attempts at inward development are forms of escapism. Why should anyone stand still and retreat into himself when there is so much to be done, unless he is afraid of facing the world, unless its problems are too difficult for him to solve? And in the second place this psychological explanation leaves unanswered the question as to why our inner life is so weak or disordered that we fear to face it and so seek relief in outward activity.

There is a partial explanation of our inner disorder which is based on the fact that our interests are spread out over a number of fields in which the standards of behavior are not consistent with one another. Our home creates one set of requirements, our social club another, our meeting for worship another, our business or the business on which we are dependent, another. In each case we attempt to fit ourselves into the code of behavior of a certain group of persons and this code may be and often is different from the code of other groups. The standard of behavior in our religious group for instance may be quite different from the standard in our business group. The result is an inner strain. While present in a given group we suppress the standards of the other groups, but we do not eliminate them entirely from our minds. A sense of pressure and tension results. Our ancestors were better integrated within themselves because their lives were better integrated without, they belonged to fewer different kinds of groups. In early Pennsylvania, for example, everything, whether spiritual, intellectual or economic, centered in the Quaker meeting, a condition which made possible an inner life in which there were few conflicting interests.

The activist who seeks explanations based on outer facts declares that our restlessness is due to the terrible state of the world at present. If we could just get the outer world in order we could then feel inward peace. But perhaps he has not the whole truth, perhaps the more fundamental difficulty is with our inward world. As long as there is inward chaos, all outward actions will be contaminated by this chaos. In such a case all that we do will promote rather than allay confusion. We seek to bring peace in the world when there is no peace in our hearts and as a result we infect the outer world with our inner conflict. As an old Chinese saying has it, "The right action performed by the wrong man is the wrong action."

Such inward references are typical of the teachings of Jesus. He had little to say regarding better laws, better governments, better agreements between nations to keep the peace, better organized relief work. "First be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift." "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time — Thou shalt not kill, — but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother" — and so on through the whole gospel. Such an inward emphasis is also the principal characteristic of Quakerism, which seeks to be based on New Testament Christianity. Above the outward Bible, the outward sermon, the outward Christ, the outward sacrament, the Society of Friends has uplifted the inward revelation, the Inward Christ, the inward sacrament as of supreme, though not exclusive, importance. For the Quaker, outward and inward combine in an intimate organic relation, but the inward is primary. Accordingly, when we speak of the Quaker way of meeting pressures we must expect that the answer will mainly concern our inward life and only secondarily the changes which we can produce in the outer world. If a tire is too soft we say that the outer pressure is greater than the inner pressure and we remedy the difficulty by increasing the inner pressure. It would be possible to inflate the tire by lessening the outer pressure, but this could be done only under highly specialized conditions. Nor do we meet this problem of the soft tire by going ahead of the car with tools to make the road smoother. Rather we increase the inner pressure so that all jars, bumps, sudden stops or starts can be bearably dealt with.

In similar fashion a person in danger of being overwhelmed by outside pressures can meet them best by increasing his inner dimensions. He can of course try the other plan, — creating changes in his environment in order to reduce the pressures. In the course of such efforts men have contrived a vast array of tools and scientific instruments with which great changes have been brought about in the

outer world. We are able to control almost everything except the weather and we seem to be on the verge of controlling that. But one very important element has been left out — we have not succeeded in controlling ourselves. We are still ill at ease, restless, unsatisfied, driven to increasing activity by every new invention. We overlook the all-important alternative to outer change — the increase of our inner resources, our inner strength and stability. Only so can we balance the outer forces and meet every jar and bump on the road with a power which holds its own, which may give way a little only to assert itself the more.

This then is the first answer which we propose to the problem. The Quaker way is so to order the inner life that outer pressures can be adequately met and dealt with. This is not the method of the ascetic who conquers his sensual desires by violence toward himself, nor of the hermit who avoids his fellow men, nor of the stoic who makes himself independent and indifferent to the world around him. It is rather an ordering of the inner life, so that there will be a proper balance of inner and outer, the inner holding first place. In one sense we become independent of outer tumults and conflicts, but in another sense we are not independent because we must seek to reproduce in the world around us the inner peace created within ourselves. If we do not seek to reproduce our inner peace it will become lifeless and static.

## **II. The Attainability Of Inner Peace**

But is inner peace, free from all sense of pressure, attainable? Many would say no. We have a physical body whose demands are insatiable and frequently quite at variance with the standards of the society in which we move. Also we are bound by many ties to a world around us which is in a state of conflict. We should not, even if we could, sever our ties with it. We cannot turn a deaf ear to the cries of suffering around us which disturb our peace.

This question as to the attainability of inner peace is closely related to one of the many issues in the 17th century between the early Friends and the Puritans. The Quakers maintained that perfection and freedom from a sense of guilt resulting in complete peace within could be attained. The Puritans held that perfection and its consequent inner peace and freedom were not attainable. To support their view the Quakers quoted such scripture as this, "Mark the perfect man," his end is peace (Ps. 37:37), "Be perfect ... be of one mind, live in peace" (2 Cor. 13:11), "Now the God of peace ... make you perfect" (Heb. 13:20 f.), "Until we all come ... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). There can be little doubt that early Christianity accepted the doctrine of the possibility of human perfection here and now, in this present life.

But for the Puritans and for many modern theologians man can never be free from sin and should therefore never be free from a sense of guilt. He is born in sin, they say, and remains in sin just as long as he is a part of a sinful fleshly world. The penalty may be removed by an undeserved miracle of divine grace, but the sin remains. Christ was perfect, but his perfection is wholly beyond our human reach. Though his life is our ideal, it is not an attainable ideal.

It would be interesting to speculate as to how much of our modern restlessness is due to our Puritan inheritance which demands a perpetual tension between the real and the ideal. Though Quakerism was, about the beginning of the 18th century, more influential than Puritanism in colonial America, immediately thereafter Puritanism increased while Quakerism decreased. The new on-coming mechanical age with its outward orientation was less congenial to Quakerism with its inwardly directed spirit. As a result of being outwardly directed, the human soul tended to become reduced to the level of that outward nature in which its attention was absorbed. Humanity united inseparably with the unceasing flux of material nature and

sensual desire and postponing to the next world the goal of peace and freedom from guilt, was doomed to restlessness, to the hopeless search for the unattainable. The Absolute vanished leaving only the relative. The goal receded into infinite distance leaving only means and tools. Modern man became a worshipper of tools. His philosophy is pragmatism. By removing peace and perfectability from all things this side of the grave, the Puritans doomed themselves to continual dissatisfaction and frustration, their only hope of salvation being a promise set forth for them in a sacred book. Their descendants built a great material structure in which the human soul wanders homeless and without peace.

George Fox had many arguments with the Puritans on the possibility of peace and perfection in this life. To some who “pleaded for sin” as he expressed it, he said: “If your faith be true it will give you victory over sin and the devil and purify your hearts and consciences” (Journal I, p. 56)<sup>1</sup>, and to others who said “we must always be striving” he replied, “it is a sad and comfortless sort of striving, to strive with a belief we should never overcome.” (Journal II, p. 218)

His assertion of the possibility of perfection and inward peace may seem at first sight to be based on pride and egotism but the opposite is in reality the case. Its basis is the possibility of complete obedience to the will of God in humility and self surrender. For the Quaker, perfection and its consequent inner peace can be reached when all of God’s immediate requirements as understood are faithfully met. These requirements are never so great that the individual cannot meet them. God requires more of a man than of a boy, more of a saint than of a sinner. Robert Barclay, the greatest Quaker theologian, calls this “a perfection proportionable and answerable to man’s measure whereby we are kept from transgressing the law of God and enabled to answer what he requires of us, even as he that improved his two talents so as to make of them four perfected his work ... no less than he that made of his five, ten.” (Apology,

Prop. VIII). As we are faithful to the light that we have, more will be given. Thus a soldier whose conscience tells him to fight must fight or be a coward. But if he is faithful to the very best that is given to him from on High and endeavours through prayer and worship to increase his sensitivity to the will of God, he will eventually learn another and better way. "There is a growing in the life even where the heart is purified from sin, even as Christ did grow and wax strong in spirit, for a state of perfection doth not exclude degrees" (Isaac Penington, Works, I, p. 391).

Inner peace comes through obedience to the Divine Voice not, as Jesus pointed out, blindly as a slave obeys a master, but as a friend complies with the wishes of his friend because the two are one in spirit. "Henceforth I call you not servants but friends for the servant knoweth not what his master doeth."

### **III. Perfection And Pacifism**

An important element in this Quaker doctrine of inward peace and its relation to what is somewhat misleadingly called "perfectionism" is indicated in the setting of Jesus' saying "Be ye perfect even as your father which is in heaven is perfect." Jesus begins by saying "Love your enemies" and ends by saying that this kind of perfection which is characteristic of God, who makes "his sun to rise both on the evil and on the good," is possible for men also (Matt. 5:44-48). To be "perfect" is to love your enemies for only by loving your enemies can you remove an inner source of conflict which prevents inner peace. He alone can secure inner peace who is at peace with the world around him even though the world around him may not be at peace with him. Hatred, persecution, cursing (I quote Jesus' list) are expressions of inner disorder. Remove them and peace results; with it will come a sense of achieving that perfection which is characteristic of God who is kind to the evil (Luke

6:35). No man hates others without a sense of guilt, for in hating others he projects on them a secret unknown hatred for himself. Love removes this inner conflict which seeks satisfaction in outer conflict. The pacifist is sometimes called a perfectionist. This is true only in the limited sense that he possesses a means of removing that feeling of guilt in himself which generates conflict and hatred and is generated by them. Only when the pacifist attains inner peace does he truly live up to his name and become a peace-maker and only the peace-maker can attain inner peace.

#### **IV. Inner Conflict And Its Solution As Portrayed In The Quaker Journals**

The Society of Friends possesses a great number of spiritual autobiographies or "Journals," as they are usually called, which portray the lives of what might be called "standard Friends." This appellation is justified because these Journals were at one time read in every Quaker household in order to impress on the hearers the type of life which was the true Quaker norm. Partly through them, the Quaker cultural pattern was passed from one generation to another with remarkable success for nearly two centuries. These Journals sometimes begin with a brief account of a period of early innocence, usually followed by a description of childhood frivolities which the writer looks back upon as a waste of time. After that comes a vivid picture of inner conflict. The soul is divided, pulled in one direction by the powers of evil and in the opposite direction by the powers of good. For this season of conflict one example will stand for all. The struggle varies in intensity though it does not vary in character. Job Scott (1751-1793) writes a vivid description of his own four years struggle:

Often in the night and sometimes in the break of day I have returned home from my many meetings grievously condemned, distressed and

ashamed, wishing I had not gone into such company and resolving to do so no more. But soon my resolutions failed me and away I went again and again. The Lord followed me close in mercy and often broke in powerfully upon me turning all my mirth into mourning; yet I still got over the holy witness, did despite to the spirit of grace and repaired again and again to the haunts of diversion. — Adored forever be the name of the Lord, he forsook me not, but followed me still closer and closer and sounded the alarm louder and louder in my ears. — The way was shown me but I would not walk in it. I knew my Lord's will but did it not; mine own I still delighted in. — My days I spent in vanity and rebellion; my nights frequently in horror and distress. Many a night I scarce durst enter my chamber or lay me down in bed ... I prayed, I cried, I repented, I sinned. God still interrupted my career, disturbed my casual satisfaction and blasted all my joys. In pursuing my course I knew I was pursuing my daily and almost unsupportable distress. I knew myself a prisoner and yet I hugged my chains.

This account is condensed from ten pages of Job Scott's Journal (pp. 30-40). The passage presents, perhaps in a form more extreme than the average, a common human experience, which is often unrecognized for what it is — an uneasiness due to a pull on the soul by a Divine Power from above which cannot be escaped. It is the experience described by the Psalmist: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit! or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Ps. 139); or by Francis Thompson:

I fled him down the nights and down the days:  
 I fled him down the arches of the years.

Every human soul is pursued by the “hound of heaven,” but not every human soul knows what is pursuing him. Job Scott writes of his struggle with an understanding acquired only after the struggle was over. There was no sudden change to a state of peace. He came gradually to realize “that this inward something which had been thus long and powerfully striving with me was the true and living spirit and power of the eternal God, the very same that strove with the old world, influenced the patriarchs, prophets and apostles and visits, strives with and at seasons more or less influences the hearts of all mankind. I now saw this the only principle of all true conversion and salvation; that so long as this was resisted and rejected, separation must infallibly remain between God and the soul, but that whenever this is received and in all things thoroughly submitted to, a reconciliation takes place” (Journal, p. 41). This overcoming of the sense of separation was also an experience of the union of his own will with the will of God:

The one thing needful is real union with God, an actual joining with him in one spirit. Without this union let a man know what he will, believe, possess and enjoy whatever he may or can, but he is an alien and a wanderer on the earth. Nothing else can ever satisfy his soul or abidingly stay his mind. There is no other possible permanent rest for the sole of his foot. He may drive, toil and bustle about and many may think him in a state of enjoyment, but it is all a delusion. In the midst of all earths caresses, if he presumes to declare himself happy he does violence to truth and his own feelings and the truly wise are privy to the lie. If he professes religion, goes to meeting, practices the exteriors of devotion and talks much about faith and godliness, it may for a moment quiet his mind and deceive his soul and others

but long he cannot rest composed without living union with God (p. 43).

This “union” was no submergence of Job Scott’s individuality in some all inclusive Over-Soul, it was rather a willingness to submit to the Divine requirements whatever they might be, a willingness to take his unique individual part in a life greater than his own. “I gave up very fully and from the heart to serve the Lord in the way of his leadings. I forsook rude and vicious company, withdrew into retirement, attended the meetings of Friends and often sought the Lord and waited upon Him in solemn reverential silence alone for his counsel, direction and preservation.” After this shifting from a human-centered to a divine-centered life, Job Scott became aware of many new requirements, which he must meet if he was to retain the inward peace which he had found. One of these was his appearance in vocal ministry in the meeting for worship. The uneasiness created by holding back disappeared. “I felt,” he writes, “the return of peace in my own bosom, as a river of life for a considerable time afterward, sweetly comforting my mind and confirming me in this solemn undertaking” (p. 54). Living up to the divine requirements was no easy matter because new duties were constantly appearing. One of these, for instance, was the requirement to refuse to use the paper currency issued to support the Revolutionary War. Once, when called to undertake a long religious journey, he felt it very hard to leave his wife and children behind and financially dependent on the meeting, but he finally gave way and then he could write: “At this surrender of all things I felt the light of heaven to fill my soul.” Such decisions as this would not have been so difficult as they were if the Divine Presence had always been felt. Job Scott frequently underwent periods of aridity which were especially embarrassing when large crowds expecting to hear his ministry attended a meeting which he was visiting. Times

of doubt, darkness, failure were, he felt, necessary. "I saw pretty clearly," he writes, "in the midst of my deepest depression that if I should be favored with unremitted tranquility and divine enjoyment I should be in danger of spiritual pride and exaltation" (p. 51). But in spite of these ups and downs the search for, and attainment of, inward peace was a clearly defined process. It consisted of a willingness to obey the will of God in so far as that will could be ascertained.

I have dwelt at length on Job Scott because his life is typical of hundreds of others which are portrayed in the Quaker Journals. An initial conflict is followed by a decision which finally ends it and brings peace. But this decision only begins the long spiritual journey on which there are many difficult hurdles to surmount. The Quakers do not believe, as do some other Christians, that man is born in a state of total depravity and remains in it until he is wholly changed by conversion which transforms him from a state of nature to a completed state of grace. Conversion is the beginning not the end of a process. When inward peace disappears it is a sign that the next stage of growth is at hand and peace can only be reached if that growth takes place. A divine call may come requiring an individual to speak in a meeting. If the call is resisted inward peace disappears. In such a state Martha Routh took to her bed and became so ill that her life was despaired of. David Ferris who resisted for many years was troubled with vivid dreams which were clearly reprimands for his delinquency. Finally, to use the homely figure employed by Samuel Bownas, "the ice is broken," the Friend speaks in meeting, perhaps only to utter a single Bible verse. Profound peace again enters the soul. Hugh Judge of Concord Meeting, Pennsylvania, thus writes of his feelings after his first sermon. "My pen is not able to set forth the awful, solemn quiet, the calm, serene state of mind that I enjoyed for many days, so that it seemed that I had gotten into another world." The same peace comes

again and again as each new requirement is met, — the adoption of plain dress, the use of thee and thou instead of you, keeping on the hat or some other act considered ill mannered by the world, undertaking a difficult piece of religious service in a far country when family or business needs might have been thought to demand attention at home. Most significant in this respect is the curtailment of business when the business has grown to such an extent that it interferes with religious duties. The example of John Woolman is best known but almost every Journal writer finds it eventually necessary to exercise some restraint in business. Friends acquired a reputation for honesty and industry which frequently resulted in considerable business success. It has been frequently pointed out by historians, Arnold Toynbee among them in his *Study of History*, that material success weakened the spiritual vitality of the Society of Friends. There is truth in this but in a great many cases Friends found that inward peace could only be attained by reducing their business undertakings. John Barclay speaks for all when he says: “I believe it right to sit loose to this world and the anxieties thereof lest I be incapacitated for performing that service which may be shown to be my duty. I believe it safest for me if in any business it should be one of moderate profit and not involving much attention.”<sup>2</sup> (John Barclay, Friends Library, VI, p. 402). But such business was far from being the only distraction which could rob the soul of peace. Rebecca Jones writes: “I have shaken my hands from the gain of schoolkeeping” (Journal, p. 187); Catherine Phillips ceases to write poetry; Edward Hicks restrains his inclination to paint pictures: John Ritty reduces time spent in writing books on medicine and William Allen gives up a promising career of scientific research. Such self-surrender is not asceticism, it is an effort to attain integration of personality around a central interest by reducing competing interests. If one’s central interest is business, fundamental yearnings of the soul would be left

unsatisfied. The central interest to which all others are subordinated must be important enough to be worthy of complete, unqualified devotion. The only interest which so qualifies is the religious interest.

### **V. The Philosophical Basis**

A simple philosophy interprets this search for inward peace. Inward peace is the result of inward unity, not just a unity of ideas but a unity of the whole person, including those feelings and intuitions which arise out of the deeper areas of the soul which are beyond conscious thought. This inward unity is produced by the divine Light of Truth shining into the soul from what George Fox called "The hidden unity in the eternal being" (Journal I, p. 29). The primordial unity of the creative source, if unresisted, produces unity in the individual or the group.

No subtle metaphysic is involved here. We are speaking of a unity of will, not of substance. Since there is only one Truth, the parts of the soul, or the individuals in a group, come into unity in so far as they find and follow the one truth, just as the followers of one person come into unity in so far as they follow the will of their leader. The Light is not divided in such a way that there is one spark of divinity in one person and another spark in another. The Light in its wholeness shines into every individual, though that individual's comprehension of it may be very imperfect. In so far as the one Divine Center is approached, so far do the various fragments of an individual person or of a group of persons come into unity.

The process of attaining unity in the individual is similar to the process of attaining unity in the group. A Friends meeting, in making a decision, does not vote, because a vote would emphasize not remove an existing division of opinion. A truth must be sought which transcends the fragmentary insights of various individuals or factions. As

the discussion proceeds each partial insight supplements every other partial insight until truth emerges and the meeting becomes unified in a single insight. The decision thus arrived at is not intended to be a compromise, though it often is a compromise, but a new creation which no member of the group could have arrived at alone. This method does not always succeed but it succeeds often enough to justify the theory behind it. It is definitely a religious method requiring willingness to submerge individual desires and prejudices and to obey the will of God wherever it may lead. Religion in this case is a method whereby, through prayer, worship, and patient waiting often in silence, the soul may become sensitized to the Light of Truth and willing to submit to it. Only through this attitude of obedience can real inner unity arise either in the individual or in the group. Conflict in the soul arises from refusal to accept the truth. As one Quaker journalist, Stephen Crisp, puts it: "My wisdom and reason were overcome by the truth, I could not therewith withstand it and defended it with the same reason by which I resisted it, and so was yet a stranger to the cross that was to crucify me" (Journal, 1694, p. 16). Pride, self-will, an exclusive loyalty to ones own fragmentary viewpoint must be crucified if man is to be resurrected into that newness of life in which he is at peace.

## **VI. The Place Of Self-Surrender**

Self-surrender of man to God is often misunderstood because of the language used in describing it. The word "surrender" seems to imply an attitude of passivity which is out of tune with the tendency of our present age toward extreme activism. The effort at self-annihilation, accompanied by the expectation that, when all human thought and feeling subsides, God may manifest his redeeming power in the soul is sometimes described as

*Quiestism.* This word too, is misleading. It places the emphasis only on the negative side of this religious experience. In Quakerism the negative is not an end in itself but a preparation for the positive. If the lower is quieted it is only that the higher may have opportunity to assert itself. The weeds must be cleared away if the flower is to grow. The human must be still if the divine is to be heard. In earlier forms of Quaker theology the distinction between the divine and the human is thought of as sharp and definite, in some modern forms divine and human merge as a finger merges into the hand; in either case self-surrender in silent expectant waiting should be the first spiritual exercise, a prerequisite of all others. If divine and human are too closely identified, self-surrender becomes meaningless and man remains entangled in the web of his own weaknesses and contradictions. Inward quieting is the negative side of a positive experience. It may even result in intense activity as is illustrated on almost every page of the Quaker Journals. John Woolman while making a dangerous visit to Indians on the frontier writes: "My mind was centered in resignation in which I always found quietness" (Journal, p. 203).

No Quaker was more feverishly active than Thomas Shillitoe. He visited "in the love of the Gospel" thousands of drinking houses in Ireland, prisoners and outlaws in various lands, King, Czar and Emperor. Nothing could stop him, though he was by nature a shy and timorous character. The following passage from his Journal discloses the source of his strength:

When I am led to take a view of the accumulated difficulties that I must expect in the prosecution of the work before me, my soul is humbled and bowed within me as into the very dust; whereby my mind at times became sorrowfully charged with an apprehension. I should not have strength to proceed agreeably to the

expectation I had given my friends, and thereby shamefully expose myself. But Divine goodness appeared for my help with the animating assurance, that if I remained willing to become like a cork on the mighty ocean of service, which my great Master should require of me, in the storm and in the calm, free from the lead of human reason, not consulting and conferring with flesh and blood, willing to be wafted hither and thither, as the Spirit of the Lord my God should blow upon me, he would care for me every day and every way; so that there should be no lack of strength to encounter all my difficulties. Here my discouragements vanished. (Journal, 1839, Vol. I, pp. 229-230.)

One of the most powerful preachers of the doctrine of complete resignation as the way to inward peace was Elias Hicks. Expressions like the following abound in his published sermons: "I felt nothing when I came into this meeting nor had I a desire after anything but to center down into abasement and nothingness: and in this situation I remained for a while, till I found something was stirring and rising in my spirit. And this was what I labored after — to be empty, to know nothing, to call for nothing, and to desire to do nothing." (The Quaker, vol. I, p. 244).

It would be useless to multiply such examples. In so far as Quietism means the surrender of the human or self-centered will in order that the divine may become active in and through the human, it is a universal Quaker doctrine. Cut off from the higher God-centered will, the lower self-centered will seeks satisfaction in an area too limited to satisfy it. As a result there is no inward peace. But the remedy is not far off. In the silence of prayer, meditation and worship the soul learns to say "not my will but thine be done." The peace of God floods in and along with the peace

of God there also comes sooner or later the call to action without which that peace cannot continue.

George Fox lived a life of tireless activity, but this activity was rooted in inward peace and stillness. Throughout his epistles he calls on Friends to be still. "Stand still in that which is pure after ye see yourselves" (Ep. 10). "Wait in the Light" (Ep. 63). "Standing still in the Light within and therein waiting, ye will see your Savior Christ Jesus" (Ep. 79). "Wait in the Life which will keep you above Words" (Ep. 119). "Be low and still in the Life and Power" (Ep. 146). "In the Stillness and Silence of the Power of the Almighty dwell" (Ep. 201). With this call to stillness there is also a call to that which is cool, and free from the heat of passion and desire. "Dwell in the Cool Sweet Holy Power of God" (Ep. 131), "Dwell in the endless Power of the Lord — that hath the Wisdom which is sweet and cool and pure" (Ep. 242). "Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit" (Journal I, p. 433).

## **VII. The Habitation Of Peace**

Quaker writers sometimes speak as if there were a calm area in the soul to which one might retire as to a quiet room, well shielded from the outer tumult. Thus Fox writes to some Friends enduring severe persecution (Ep. 206) "All in the power of the living God abide in which ye may feel Life, Peace and Rest and an abiding peace, a secret chamber to turn into" (Ep. 208). And John Woolman writes: "The place of prayer is a precious habitation ... I saw this habitation to be safe ... to be inwardly quiet when there were great stirrings and commotions in the world" (Journal, Whittier Edition, p. 236). John Pemberton writes to Susanna Fothergill in 1755 when the French and Indian war was coming on: "Yet there are such that can, in humility and thankfulness say they are favored with a quiet habitation." And John Barclay writes "Oh it is a sweet thing to get into the calmness, to that spot where all cares, fears, and doubts

are swallowed up” (John Barclay, Letters, 1820). This “chamber,” “habitation” or “spot” is, in Quaker philosophy, that area of perfect unity and peace which existed before all multiplicity and strife. “Be at peace one with another,” writes Fox, “then you will live in the Prince of Peace’s peace and in his Kingdom, Dominion and Life in which is unity, which was before Enmity was” (Ep. 208). “Stand steadfast in the Unchangeable Life and Seed of God which was before all changing and alterings were” (Ep. 76).

### **VIII. Getting Atop Of Things**

That peace can be found within a certain area of the soul is a figure of speech which allocates to space that which is not in space. There is, in Quaker writings, another significant figure based on a space relationship. When Fox describes an encounter with an obstruction of any kind, — a person, a doubt, a temptation, a difficult situation — he often ends with the phrase “but I got atop of it.” In his epistles he frequently gives advice to others to do likewise: “Keep atop of that which will cumber the mind” (Ep. 86), “Take heed of being hurried with many thoughts but live in that which goes over them all” (Ep. 52), “But there is danger and temptation to you of drawing your minds into your business, and clogging them with it: so that ye can hardly do anything to the service of God, but there will be crying my business, my business, and your minds will go into the things and not over the things” (Ep. 131). “Keep your heads above the waters of the sea in which there is a tempest.”

This can be interpreted as meaning that many problems are not soluble on their own level. If there is a conflict of two opposing ideas or feelings, no real solution is arrived at if one simply prevails over the other, eliminating whatever good there may be in the weaker. Too often the weaker is

driven out of sight only to reappear in disguise to continue the conflict. But by achieving a higher, more inclusive experience we can get above the problem, look down on it, and find that it ceases to be a problem. This process is described by the psychologist Jung in more secular terms:

I have often seen individuals who simply outgrew a problem which had destroyed others. This outgrowing revealed itself on further experience to be the raising of the level of consciousness. Some higher or wider interest arose on the person's horizon, and through this widening of his view, the insoluble problem lost its urgency. It was not solved logically in its own terms, but faded out in contrast to a new and stronger life tendency. ... What on a lower level had led to the wildest conflicts and to emotions full of panic, viewed from the higher level of the personality now seemed like a storm in a valley seen from a high mountain top. This does not mean that the thunderstorm is robbed of its reality; it means that instead of being in it, one is now above it. ... The greatest and most important problems of life ... can never be solved, but only outgrown (*Secret of the Golden Flower*, p. 88. Harcourt Brace & Co., Inc., New York).

George Fox in his letter to Cromwell's daughter, Lady Claypole, who was "sick and much troubled in mind" gives advice which fits this doctrine of Jung.

Whatever temptations, distractions, confusions the light doth make manifest and discover, do not look at these temptations, confusions, corruptions; but look at the light, which discovers them, and makes them manifest; and with the

same light you may feel over them, to receive power to stand against them. The same Light which lets you see sin and transgression will let you see the covenant of God, which blots out your sin and transgression, which gives victory and dominion over it, and brings into covenant with God. For looking down at sin and corruption and distraction ye are swallowed up in it: but looking at the light which discovers them, ye will see over them. That will give victory; and ye will find grace and strength: there is the first step to peace. (Journal I., p. 493.)

This is quite different from holding that evil is unreal and hence to be ignored. It means that inward conflict is avoided by a kind of pacifist technique which uses no violence on the evil in ourselves. By fixing our attention on the light, the darkness is not only revealed for what it is but is transcended.

To use Fox's words we "get atop of it." The dark forces of the soul cannot be removed by a direct attack. To fight them is to give them the only real strength which they can possess. They should not be despised or hated. As revealed by the light they must first be accepted for what they are. Then, by allowing the light to shine and so permitting higher forces in the background to emerge and operate, there will arise an interest, a concern, a new life, call it what you will, that will surround and overcome the darkness and center the soul in that which is above it. It is not through a struggle to possess the Light but rather by permitting the Light to possess us that inner darkness is overcome. The Quaker Journals do not indicate that this way is always successful. There are many records of long periods of dryness, but sooner or later refreshing showers descend and new life is generated in the soul.

### **IX. Inward Peace As A Test Of Guidance**

Inward peace is both an end and a means. As a means it becomes an evidence of divine approval while lack of it is an evidence that some divine requirement is not being fulfilled. In a Quaker meeting for the business of church government the following expression is frequently heard: "I would feel most easy," or "I would feel comfortable" if such and such an action were carried through or not carried through, indicating that the inward peace of the speaker would be attained only if a certain course were or were not accomplished. Throughout the Quaker Journals we find frequent reference to the absence of inward peace as a sign that some "concern," possibly to undertake a journey "in the love of the gospel," possibly to engage in some effort for social reform, had been laid upon the individual. When that concern has been carried through there is reference to the return of peace. It is not essential that the undertaking be successful for inward peace to result. It is only necessary that the individual feel that he has done all that he is able to do to carry out the requirement. God does not require more than is possible. He only demands that we live up to our capacity. As for consequences, how can a finite mind tell what they in the long course of time may be. History shows many instances of apparent immediate failure resulting in ultimate success. The pacifist for example, who finds that in joining an army he will have no peace of mind and who for this reason refuses to join may be presented with many excellent arguments which he cannot refute showing him the evil consequences of his refusal, but he knows that his feelings are just as truly organs of knowledge for certain aspects of experience as is reason. If properly sensitized to the perception of moral and religious values, the feelings may be more reliable organs than the intellect. Thought may reveal immediate relative consequences but

inspired feeling may go far beyond thought, in some measure revealing the absolute and ultimate. That inward peace is a test of guidance is, of course, a dangerous doctrine. "Woe unto those who are at ease in Zion." There is a kind of placidity which results from lack of sensitiveness to the needs of others, to callousness and hardness, which shut out the world and its sufferings. Such calm may be genuine for a shellfish but not for a human being. Let him who seeks peace by indifference examine himself closely, he will find that in the depths of his heart there is not really peace. If he attempts to reduce himself to the level of pure sensation he will find it difficult if not impossible to avoid yearning and regret. The peace of callousness is a false peace, a truce concealing hidden conflict.

If inward peace is to be used as a test of guidance two conditions must be honestly met — first the feelings must be sensitized through prayer, worship, meditation or other spiritual exercises, so that they may be trustworthy for ascertaining moral or religious truth.<sup>3</sup> Second, the guidance of the individual must be checked with the guidance of others — the guidance of the group to which he belongs and the guidance of inspired utterances of the past and present. The guidance of the group is not always superior to the guidance of the individual, but it must be taken into account. If a Quaker concern, when submitted to the meeting, is not approved by the meeting, only a very clear and strong feeling should lead the individual to carry out the leading. There is no sure evidence of Divine guidance. The presence or absence of inward peace, whether in the individual or the group, is a useful test if made under right conditions.

In the days when Friends dealt in a disciplinary way with members who broke with the Quaker standard of behavior, they pointed out to the delinquent individual that the Lord was exerting a pressure on him which was disturbing his peace and that he could remove this pressure

by obedience to the Divine Will. David Ferris of Wilmington writes to Robert Pleasants in 1774 regarding his slaves:

I fear that to hold them in a state of slavery, deprived of their natural right may be a means of depriving thee of thy own freedom, and not only prevent thee from being so serviceable in thy day as otherwise thou might be but be a bar in the way of peace here and hereafter ... I cannot suppose that at this time of the day I need use arguments to convince thee of the evil of slave-keeping. Obedience is what I judge to be wanting; and it is sorrowful to think that people should go on in the way they know to be wrong. ... If the Lord requires thee to set thy slaves free, obey him promptly and leave the result to him, and peace shall be within thy borders.

This was a typical Quaker appeal. If what you are doing gives you no sense of peace then it is wrong, regardless of the apparent consequences of acting otherwise.

## **X. The Return To Inwardness**

What is called in this essay "The Quaker Doctrine of Inward Peace" is obviously not a doctrine which is unique to the Society of Friends. In its general and essential character it can be found in all the so-called higher religions. What is peculiar to Quakerism is more a matter of emphasis and method than of substance. That a quietistic type of resignation and restraint results, not in retirement to hermitage or cloister, but rather in more intense activity in the world; that a life centered in the peace of God may be lived not only by priest, pastor and religious professional but by merchant, banker, farmer, mother of a large family and all who are in daily contact with a sinful world. Inward

peace may be felt in the heart which shares the burden of the world's sufferings, — this doctrine has received a peculiar, though by no means an exclusive emphasis, in the Society of Friends.

Only in its method is the Society of Friends unique. The Quaker meeting for worship and the Quaker meeting for business are unique institutions. It is their purpose to expose the soul to the Light from God so that peace is removed if it ought to be removed, or attained if it can be attained. If the soul becomes sensitive, if its vision is widened and deepened so that new areas of life come within its ken, then a new requirement may be laid upon it and peace removed until that requirement is met. If the soul is able to find in the silence union with the peace of God at the heart of existence, then inward peace is secured and new knowledge and power received. The soul, no longer exhausting its energy in conflict with itself, becomes integrated and unified. Hence arises new power and vision for tasks ahead. This is what Dante expressed by the words: "In His will is our peace."

The examples given in this essay are taken from the 17th and 18th centuries. This was a time when, among Friends, the inward and outward were comparatively integrated. It was a time of social pioneering in such fields as equality of sexes, races and classes, simplicity of life, peace-making, prison reform, reform of mental hospitals, abolition of slavery, education. Yet it was also a time of intense inwardness, when the primary emphasis was placed on divine guidance and the search for inward peace. This inwardness increased men's sensitivity to moral evils, and enabled situations to be faced freshly rather than through the obscuring haze of conventional patterns.

Modern Quakerism, affected by the prevailing trends of our time, has lost much of this inwardness. Activity continues to increase. Outward peace is sought as never

before but men search less intently for the inward peace which is both source and goal of outward peace.

After a long period of trial we have found that modern scientific skill has brought neither outer nor inner peace. The attention of science has been focused upon the outward, ignoring the fact that the powerful instruments which science has created may be used for good or evil according to the inward state of the men who use them. But even if scientific skill had turned its attention to the inward it would not necessarily have brought peace. Applied science may work out methods by which men can control others through advertising or propaganda, but such control can be exerted for good or evil purposes and can therefore create either peace or conflict. In recent years scientific skill has been largely used for conflict, either to promote a militant nationalism or to produce a restless insatiable desire for possessions in order to increase the sale of goods. This is not the road to peace. It is clear evidence that the inner life is evaporating out of our culture, that the soul which held this culture together is vanishing, leaving outer force as a means of providing security and unity.

But in the midst of such disintegration there are now, as there have been in earlier ages, persons and groups who discover or rediscover the sources of peace and unity which have been hinted at in these pages. All men everywhere must come to realize that outer conflict results from inner conflict, that inner conflict can be healed only by that Power Divine which descends to men from on high. "Peace I leave with you," said Jesus, "my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John, 14:27).

Genuine peace does not result from treaties or political institutions, least of all from fear inspired by force. Peace is received by human souls through resignation of the self-centered will and through expectancy.

### **Notes**

1. References to the Journal are to the Bi-Centenary Edition 1901.
2. This and other examples of curtailment of business are given in *Children of Light*, by H. H. Brinton, pp. 402-405.
3. Aesthetic truth could also be included though it is not pertinent to this discussion.