

Quaker Strongholds

By Caroline Stephen

Passages Selected By
Mary Gould Ogilvie



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A postal card, now in the Pendle Hill collection, from William James to J. Henry Bartlett of Philadelphia.

Rome, Dec. 5, 1900

I thank you heartily for "Quaker Strongholds" — just sent hither. I had never heard either of it or its authoress, tho' I know Leslie Stephen well. It is the strong book of a strong mind and soul — What a powerful-natured family! I have been much interested in some of its chapters. I already have browsed in the earlier Quaker literature, and Fox's movement has always seemed to me the purest and freest-of-falsities of any of the successful religious movements of which I have any knowledge. It was in fact a movement for veracity and away from lies almost altogether. Thanks again!

Wm. James

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of Quakerism to modern tastes, that will revive its power. It is a fresh breaking forth of the old, the unchanging and unchangeable power of light and truth itself, met and invited by a fresh submission of heart in each one of us, which can alone invigorate what is languishing amongst us.

Had this power ever wholly disappeared from amongst us, there would be little use in dwelling fondly upon its deserted tenement. It is because a measure of the ancient spirit is still to be recognized amongst our now widely scattered remnant that I would fain stir it up, amongst our own members especially, and if possible also amongst others, by means of the experience actually acquired by the Society of Friends of the power of an exclusively spiritual religion.

A Foreword

Caroline E. Stephen (1834-1909) a Friend by conviction, was a member of the Stephen family, prominent in England and well-known in other countries for several generations. Her father was Sir James Stephen and her brothers, James Fitzjames and Leslie Stephen, the latter being the father of Virginia Woolf. Though they were not of the same generation and their fields of thought and writing differed widely, one can clearly note in the works of Caroline Stephen and Virginia Woolf, the common characteristics of lucid expression, springing from insight beyond the usual, and unflinching honesty in carrying the line of thought to its reasonable conclusion. Neither was required to follow a conventional pattern of schooling, each making independent pursuit of knowledge according to her tastes, but being well-tutored, no doubt, by the intellectually-alive company of family and friends.

To the study of Quakerism, Caroline Stephen brought the judgment of an intellectual person who came into contact with the Society of Friends at a mature age, after having closely analyzed her own position in regard to religion and the church. In *Quaker Strongholds*, as in her other writings, she seems to keep constantly in mind the points of view of those to whom Quakerism is new and strange and of those well-versed in its belief and practice, making a kind of bridge between them. She makes a bridge, also, between the early and the modern in Quaker thought, her candid and fearless analyses seeming in many instances to belong to our own time, rather than to that in which she wrote.

At Pendle Hill in the Quakerism course, major consideration is given each year to the writings of Caroline Stephen. Howard Brinton refers to *Quaker Strongholds* as a Quaker classic, comparable in its period to those earlier works of Barclay, Penington, Penn, and Woolman, selections from which have already been published as Pendle Hill pamphlets. Within the years 1890-1923, at least four editions of this work were published, and so widely distributed in England and America that copies are obtainable from most Friends' libraries, both private and institutional.

Since this is an abridgement, it has seemed necessary to confine it to Caroline Stephen's explanation of the particular tenets which she so repeatedly asserts to be "cornerstone and foundation" of Quakerism — the faith which she so triumphantly made her own.

M.G.O.

independence of Quakerism — its resolute vindication of each man's individual responsibility to his Maker, and to Him alone. The supreme value assigned by Friends to consistency of conduct — to strict veracity and integrity, and other plain moral duties — has, I believe, an intimate connection with their abandonment of all reliance upon outward observances, or official support and absolution. "The answer of a good conscience" comes into prominence when all extraneous means of purification are discarded.

But deeper than all need of mere conviction is the need of rest and stability. We must be at rest before we can be free. In quietness and in confidence is our strength. While our hearts are tossed and agitated by every wave of this troublesome world, while the shadows of passing things have power to distract and confuse our vision, we cannot clearly discern that truth which alone can make us free. To experience in our own hearts the harmonizing, purifying, invigorating power of the Divine will is to be at rest for ourselves and for others; not to be set free from suffering or to become indifferent to it, but to be undisturbed by it — to know that underneath all the agitations of the creatures are the everlasting arms, to receive strength to consent to whatever is ordained by that blessed will, and to resist whatever is opposed to it. In thus taking up the cross, we begin to see something of its glory, to experience something of its redeeming power.

There is, I believe and am sure, a special and urgent need in these days for that witness to the light — light both within and without — which was the special office of early Quakerism. It seems to me that the framework of the Society has vigour and elasticity enough yet to be used as an invaluable instrument by a new generation of fully convinced Friends, were our members but fully willing and resolved to submit to the necessary Divine discipline. It is no new wave of "creaturely activity," no judicious adapting

above all things the doctrine of the inward light, and the primary necessity of immediate inspiration and guidance to the bringing forth of any good word or work, and especially to the performance of any acceptable worship, have abundant evidence to produce, in the writings of Fox, Barclay, Penn, Penington, and other fathers of the Society, that this was the foundation and the constant burden of all their teaching. Those, on the other hand, who are throwing themselves heart and soul into active efforts, say truly enough that the early Friends did not so “wait for guidance” as to be content to sit still and make no effort to lighten the darkness around them.

There are, of course, dangers in either extreme — in the over-evaluation of visible and tangible activity, and in the undue intensity of introspective quietism. Too much “inwardness” seems to develop an extraordinary bitterness and spirit of judgment, under the shadow of which no fresh growth would be possible. It is obviously dangerous to sanity. Too much “outwardness” dilutes and destroys the very essence of our testimony, encourages a worthless growth of human dependence, and can hardly fail to be dangerous to sincerity. But yet the divergence is, I believe, a case rather of diversity of gifts and functions than of contradiction in principle. Both functions are surely needed. Where a living fountain is really springing up within, it must needs tend to overflow. The leaves and blossoms are as essential to the health and fruitfulness of a tree as its root. The secret, as I believe, of the strength of our Society, its peculiar qualification for service in these days, lies in its strong grasp of the oneness of the inward and the outward, as well as in the deep and pure spirituality of its aim in regard to both.

The Quaker tradition of “nonresistance” has attracted a degree of popular attention which is, I think, out of all proportion to that bestowed on the profound and stubborn

Passages From *Quaker Strongholds*

Any important revival of religion must be the result of a fresh recognition and acceptance of the very principles upon which the Society of Friends is built. What these principles and the practices resulting from them really are, is a subject on which there is a surprising amount of ignorance amongst us, considering how widely spread is the connection with and interest about Friends amongst the members of other persuasions. Many people, indeed, probably suppose (if they think about it at all) that the Society is fast dying out, and the “silent worship” of tradition, a thing of the past — impracticable, and hardly to be seriously mentioned in these days of talk and of breathless activity.

Some such vague impression floated, I believe, over my own mind, when I first came within reach of a Friends’ meeting, and, somewhat to my surprise, was cordially made welcome to attend it.

On that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning, I found myself one of a small company of silent worshippers, who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by any human utterance. Utterance I knew was free, should the words be given; and before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place amongst the rest of us. I did not pay much attention to the words he spoke, and I have no recollection of their purport. My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for

communion with God — with the sense that at last I had found a place where I might, without the faintest suspicion of insincerity, join with others in simply seeking His presence. To sit down in silence could at the least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven.

And since that day, now more than seventeen years ago, Friends' meetings have indeed been to me the greatest of outward helps to a fuller and fuller entrance into the spirit from which they have sprung; the place of the most soul-subduing, faith-restoring, strengthening and peaceful communion, in feeding upon the bread of life, that I have ever known. I cannot but believe that what has helped me so unspeakably might be helpful to multitudes in this day of shaking of all that can be shaken, and of restless inquiry after spiritual good. It is in the hope of making more widely known the true source and nature of such spiritual help that I attempt to describe what I have called our strongholds — those principles which cannot fail, whatever may be the future of the Society which for more than two hundred years has taken its stand upon them.

The Inner Light

The one cornerstone of belief upon which the Society of Friends is built is the conviction that God does indeed communicate with each one of the spirits He has made, in a direct and living inbreathing of some measure of the breath of His own Life; that He never leaves Himself without a witness in the heart as well as in the surroundings of man; that the measure of light, life, or grace thus given increases by obedience; and that in order clearly to hear the Divine voice speaking within us we need to be still; to be alone with Him, in the secret place of His Presence; that all flesh should keep silence before Him.

To myself it was the greatest relief to find a body of Christians who held the simple, and, to my mind, the one worthy view of Christianity, as a dispensation entirely spiritual in its nature; a state of enlightenment and true worship in which forms and shadows had passed away and the substance alone was to be laboured for. It was in the quiet meetings already described that I myself first learnt the full meaning of the words, "baptizing into the Name . . . and the communion of the body of Christ."

Cornerstone and Foundation

I have said that our cornerstone and foundation is our belief that God does indeed communicate with each one of the spirits He has made in a direct and living inbreathing of some measure of the breath of His own life. That belief is not peculiar to us. What is peculiar to us is our testimony to the freedom and sufficiency of this immediate Divine communication to each one. The ground of our existence as a separate body is our witness to the independence of the true gospel ministry of all forms and ceremonies, and of all humanly imposed limitations and conditions. We desire to guard this supreme function of the human spirit from all disturbing influences as jealously as the mariner guards his compass from anything which might deflect the needle from the pole; and for the same reason — that we believe the direct influence of the Divine Mind upon our own to be our one unerring Guide in the voyage of life, and that the faculty by which we discern it is but too easily drawn aside by human influences. Two main currents have flowed side by side, and have not resulted in any considerable division of the stream.

Both parties claim to be taking their stand upon the original principles of the early Friends. Those who uphold

We Friends believe that it is not necessary that each congregation should be placed under the spiritual care of a pastor. We believe that it is the right and the duty of each individual Christian to approach the Divine presence in his own way — to sit under the immediate teaching of Christ Himself, and to be ready to take his share, if at any time called upon by the one Head of the Church, in offering prayer, praise, thanksgiving, or exhortation, for the help, comfort, and edification of all. Should no vocal services be offered in any meeting, we do not therefore feel that it has failed of its effect as an occasion of united worship.

Some small meetings are frequently, if not habitually, held entirely in silence; in all our meetings, there is some space left for that worship which is beyond words. The responsibility for the lively and healthy state of each meeting is, or should be, felt to rest upon all its members, both collectively and individually. I think that those who are the most ready to accept with reverence whatever is offered in simple obedience, the most desirous themselves to learn simply to obey, will also be the first to feel that no one should venture to break the silence in which inward prayer may be arising from other hearts except under the influence (to use the time-honoured Quaker expression) of “a fresh anointing from above.” The nearest approach to a description of what we hold to be a right ministry would seem to be — words spoken during, and arising from, actual communion with God.

The institution of a separate clergy and that of the sacraments form essentially one system. The early Friends went to the root of the matter when they abandoned at once the whole of what they called “mountain and Jerusalem worship,” as opposed to the worship in Spirit and in truth, which is not limited to any time or place.

The grounds of their action are fully set forth and defended with undeniable vigour and ability by Robert Barclay in his famous “Apology.”

The founders of the Society of Friends were not philosophers, but spoke of these things from an intense and abundant personal experience, which led them with confidence to appeal to the experience of all sorts and conditions of men for confirmation of their doctrine as to the light within. And they were not disappointed. The history of the sudden gathering of the Society, of its rapid formation into a strongly organized body, and of the extraordinary constancy, zeal, and integrity displayed by its original members, is a most impressive proof of the trueness of their aim.

When questioned as to the reality and nature of the light within, the early Friends were accustomed in return to ask the questioners whether they did not sometimes feel something within them that showed them their sins; and to assure them that this same power, which *made manifest*, and therefore was truly light, would also, if yielded to, lead them out of sin. This assurance, that the light which revealed was also the power which would heal sin, was George Fox’s gospel. The power itself was described by him in many ways, Christ within, the hope of glory; the light, life, spirit, and grace of Christ; the seed, the new birth, the power of God unto salvation, and many other such expressions flow forth in abundant streams of heartfelt eloquence. To “turn people to the light within,” to “direct them to Christ, their free Teacher,” was his daily business.

For this purpose he and his friends traveled continually up and down the country, holding meetings everywhere, and finding a never-failing response to their appeal, as is proved by the bare numbers of those who, within a very few years, were ready to encounter persecution, and to maintain their testimony through long years of imprisonment and sufferings. In the earlier days of the Society the doctrine of the light within was clearly one readily understood and accepted by the ordinary English mind. In

our own day it is usually spoken of as a mysterious tenet, springing up now and again in the minds of isolated enthusiasts, but indigenous only in Oriental countries, and naturally abhorrent to the practical common sense of our own people.

The difference arises, I think, from the fact that there are circles within circles, or spheres within spheres, and that the light to which the early Friends bore witness was not *confined* to that innermost sanctuary of whose very existence, perhaps, none but a few “mystics” are conscious; but that, while proceeding from those deepest depths, it was recognized as also lighting up conscience, and conduct, and all the tangible outer framework of life; and that it was called “within” not alone in the sense of lying nearer the centre of our being than anything else, but also in the (to ordinary minds) more intelligible sense of beginning at home — of being the reward of each man’s own faithfulness, of being independent of priests and ordinances. The religion they preached was one which enforced the individual responsibility of each one for his own soul; it was a portable and verifiable religion — a religion which required truth in word and deed, plain dealing and kindness and self-control, and which did not require ceremonial observances or priestly guarantees; a religion in which practice went for more than theory, and all were expected to take their stand on one level, and their share in the worship and the business of “the church.” It is easy to see how such preaching as this would commend itself to English independence. It surely commends itself to the unchanging sense of truth in the human heart, and will be welcomed whenever it is preached from first-hand experience of its power.

“That which you seek without, you have already within you.” The words which changed the life of Madame Guyon will never lose their power while human nature is occupied with the struggle for a state of stable equilibrium. The

True worship, therefore, implies inspiration. It is the inspired prayer which transfigures life — which is mighty with the might of the fountain from whence it flows. While we separate worship and inspiration we can never think worthily of either. I do indeed believe that the very desire of our heart is often granted to us in reply to our petition.

Let us, therefore, recognize and avow, when occasion serves, that prayer, worship, or communion with God is a larger, deeper, fuller thing than mere asking and having. Let us acknowledge that the simplest and most inarticulate cry for help — the voice of the “infant crying in the night, and with no language but a cry” — is as sure to enter the ear of the Father of spirits as the deepest prayer ever uttered by saint or martyr. Let us remember that, according to the teaching of our Lord Himself, the one voice which is more sure (if degrees of sureness there can be) than any other of being listened to by the good Shepherd, is the voice of the one who has strayed the furthest from the fold, and is the most deeply conscious of being afar off.

Surely we may with reverence say that, in a true and a deep sense, God Himself is the answer to prayer.

Ministry

Our ministry may be said to be free in several distinct senses.

1. It is open to all.
2. Its exercise is not subject to any prearrangement.
3. It is not paid.

We believe that the one essential qualification for the office of a minister is the anointing of the Holy Spirit; and that this anointing is poured out without respect of persons upon men and women, upon old and young, upon learned and unlearned. The gift is, we believe, a purely spiritual one, as much beyond our control as the rain from heaven; yet as unfailing, as abundant, as necessary to fertility.

Much mischief is, I fear, often done by the too free and ready communication, especially in print, of “remarkable answers to prayer”; of incidents which, overpoweringly eloquent as they may well be to those whom they concern, are but as an idle tale to strangers — a tale the telling of which sometimes lends itself but too easily to the mere love of signs and wonders. They also often lay bare the most painful effects of unconscious self-importance — the most glaring tendency to refer everything to oneself as the centre, and to ignore the legitimate share of others in the events referred to.

For it is not in such outward and tangible events as these, not in the things which can be passed from hand to hand like coins, that the real power and soul-subduing influence of a Divine communication is most unmistakably felt. It is the still small voice which overcomes; the gentle combination of perhaps very ordinary circumstances, which, when combined, acquire the significance of a distinct message. Just as when we see letters brought together and placed under our eyes, which together form a word replying to our thought, we infer that they have been so arranged by some one who knew what was in our minds; so, to those of us who habitually not only ask but watch for Divine instruction, there occur again and again combinations of events, adjustments even of the minutest details, which produce a quite irresistible sense that the finger of God is pointing the lesson He would have us learn.

To those who in any degree do know His voice, it gradually becomes clear that prayer and its answer are inseparable. The answer is as the answer of the atmosphere to the lungs, of light to the eyes. The humble and contrite heart opens its doors to its Maker, and is filled with His presence. Inspiration — the inbreathing power from above, by which alone all that is heavenly in us is brought about, — this is the other aspect of worship.

perennial justification of Quakerism lies in its energetic assertion that the kingdom of heaven is within us; that we are not made dependent upon any outward organization for our spiritual welfare. Its perennial difficulty lies in the inveterate disposition of human beings to look to each other for spiritual help, in the feebleness of their perception of that Divine Voice which speaks to each one in a language no other ear can hear, and in the apathy which is content to go through life without the attempt at any true individual communion with God.

“The kingdom of heaven is within us.” No Christian disputes the truth of this deep word of Christ Himself. But its interpretation has a wide range. In His own lips it was used in opposition to the “Lo here! and lo there!” for which he was preparing His Disciples. They were not to be hurried away into a search for Christ in all directions, but were to remember that His kingdom (surely implying His living presence) is in the hearts of His people. He Himself makes none of those abstruse distinctions between consciousness and being, accident and essence, subject and object, or even superficial and profound, and so forth, which it has been the delight of many of His most devoted followers to interweave with this simple expression “within you.”

I think it is inevitable that the more deeply we penetrate into the recesses of the human mind, the more we should have a sense of approaching an inner sanctuary, and that there is a very real and deep sense in which this word “within you” may be understood as meaning “above all in your inmost depths.” But this is not its original or its obvious meaning. In the teaching of our Lord there is a frequent reference to the distinction of inward and outward, but the distinction is drawn in a broad and simple manner. It is oftenest a demand upon our sincerity and thoroughness, not upon our powers of introspection — an appeal on behalf of the weightier matters of the Law as compared with trivial and ceremonial observances.

Nothing, I believe, can really teach us the nature and meaning of inspiration but personal experience of it. That we may all have such experience if we will but attend to the Divine influences in our own hearts, is the cardinal doctrine of Quakerism. Whether this belief, honestly acted on, will manifest itself in the homespun and solid, but only too sober morality of the typical everyday Quaker, or whether it will land us in the mystical fervours of an Isaac Penington, or the apostolic labours of a John Woolman or a Stephen Grellet, must depend chiefly upon our natural temperament and special gifts. The range of the different forms taken by the doctrine is as wide as the range of human endowment and experience. A belief which is the common property of the prophet and the babe will, of course, yield every variety of practical result.

And here we are confronted with the real “peculiarity” of Quakerism — its relation to mysticism. There is no doubt that George Fox himself and the other fathers of the Society were of a strongly mystical turn of mind, though not in the sense in which the word is often used by the worshippers of “common sense,” as a mild term of reproach, to convey a general vague dreaminess. Nothing, certainly, could be less applicable to the early Friends than any such reproach as this. They were fiery, dogmatic, pugnacious, and intensely practical and sober-minded. But they were assuredly mystics in what I take to be the more accurate sense of that word — people, that is, with a vivid consciousness of the inwardness of the light of truth.

Mysticism

Mysticism in this sense is a well-known phenomenon, of which a multitude of examples may be found in all religions. It is, indeed, rather a personal peculiarity than a form of belief; and therefore, although from time to time associations (our own, for one) have been based upon what

that, when people insist upon “the efficacy of prayer,” they are insisting upon its very lowest use; and that the concentration of attention upon this lowest use creates a serious stumbling-block, which hinders faith in two ways.

1. It suggests a *test* which is not and cannot be uniformly favourable. Whatever the power of prayer may be — and words, I believe, must wholly fail to express it — particular requests are certainly not always granted. Our Lord explicitly prepares us for the refusal of blind requests, and our own good sense and our daily experience combine to make it abundantly clear that many requests are, and must always be, refused.

2. And more than this, there is, I believe, nobility enough in every heart capable of real prayer to cause a recoil from the idea of using it only for the purpose of obtaining advantages, be they of what kind they may. I believe, that is, that the modern perplexity about prayer arises not only from a difficulty in imagining God as One who can be influenced by our desires, but largely also from a latent sense that, even if true in fact, this is a very inadequate conception of Him to whom our worship should be addressed, and who must assuredly know better than we do what things we have need of — from a recoil, in short, against the low and coarse and unworthy tone of much that is urged on the other side.

Therefore I think that in the long-run an immeasurable gain will result to faith from modern outspokenness in recognizing the difficulties of this subject. Prayer, if regarded as an attempt to wrest favours from our heavenly Father by dint of mere importunity, is doomed to many disappointments, and stands sorely in need of their purifying discipline. Prayer is not really prayer — that is, it is not true communion with God — till it rises above the region in which willfulness is possible, to the height of “Not my will, but Thine, be done.”

us can have altogether escaped the paralyzing influence of the flood of unsolved, and apparently insoluble, moral problems, and at the same time of new and absorbingly interesting views of material things, into which this generation has been plunged. The mere demand on the attention is powerful enough to drain away a great part of the mental power formerly employed in seeking after God.

It seems His newer will,
We should not think of Him at all, but trudge it;
And of the world He has assigned us make
What best we can,

says A. H. Clough; and he utters a widely spread feeling. People's love of truth seems to themselves to be enlisted in pursuing streams which lead them away from the fountain of truth. The pursuit of scientific truth is assuredly in its place a contribution to our knowledge of God, though made by workers who may but too easily themselves lose sight of Him in their engrossing preoccupation with His works.

Two things have, as I believe, mainly tended to lower our idea of prayer, until, in minds where it is but a theory, it has been shattered against the hard facts of science. We have narrowed it to the idea of asking for things, and we have thought of it chiefly as a means of getting them.

This is surely a degradation of the idea of prayer, even though the things asked for be what are called "spiritual blessings." The word "prayer" may, it is true, be used in the restricted sense of making requests; but in that case let it be distinctly understood and kept in the mind that it is but a part — the lowest and least essential part — of worship or communion with God. It is of prayer in the larger sense — not request, but communion — that we may rightly and wisely speak as the very breath of our spiritual life; as the power by which life is transfigured; as that to which all things are possible. And in the same sort of sense I feel

are called mystical tenets, there can scarcely be anything like a real school of mysticism — at any rate in Europe. Mysticism, as we know it, is essentially individual. It refuses to be formulated or summed up. In one sense it is common to all religious persuasions; in another, it equally eludes them all. Mystics, as I understand the matter, are those whose minds, to their own consciousness, are lighted from within; who feel themselves, that is, to be in immediate inward communication with the central Fountain of light and life. They have naturally a vivid sense both of the distinction and of the harmony between the inward and the outward — a sense so vivid that it is impossible for them to believe it to be unshared by others. A true mystic believes that all men have, as he himself is conscious of having, an inward life, into which, as into a secret chamber, he can retreat at will.

Let me not be understood to mean that the process of "keeping the mind" (in Quaker phrase) "retired to the Lord" is an easy one. On the contrary it may need strenuous effort. But the *effort* can be made at will, and even the mere effort thus to retire from the surface to the depths of life is sure to bring help and strengthening — is in itself a strengthening, steadying process. It is in degree only that the mystics' gift is exceptional. They may have the sight of an eagle, but they see by the same light as the bat.

Now the obvious tendency of a vivid firsthand perception of truth, or light, is to render the possessor of it so far independent of external teachers. And we all know that in point of fact such *illuminati* always have shown a disposition to go their own way, and to disregard, if not to denounce, traditional teaching, which has brought them into frequent collisions with ecclesiastical and other authorities.

It is the easier to do this because of the two marked characteristics of mystics — quietness and independence.

Mystics are naturally independent, not only of ecclesiastical authority, but of each other. This is necessarily implied in the very idea of first-hand reception of light. While it must always constitute a strong bond of sympathy between those who recognize it in themselves and in each other, it naturally indisposes them to discipleship. They sit habitually at no man's feet, and do not as a rule greatly care to have anyone sit at theirs. Mysticism in this sense seems naturally opposed to tradition. No true mystic would hold himself bound by the thoughts of others. He does not feel the need of them, being assured of the sufficiency and conscious of the possession of that inward guidance, whether called light, or voice, or inspiration, which must be seen, heard, felt, by each one in his own heart, or not at all. But the duty of looking for and of obeying this guidance is a principle which may be inculcated and transmitted from generation to generation like any other principle. Its hereditary influence is very perceptible in old Quaker families, where a unique type of Christian character resulting from it is still to be met with.

Quietism

Quietness naturally accompanies the belief in this inward guidance, not only because in the Divine presence all that is merely human necessarily sinks into silent insignificance, but also because it is instinctively felt that it is only in stillness that any perfect reflection from above can be formed in the mirror of the human spirit. The natural fruit of mysticism is quietism.

I have no means of estimating the actual prevalence of mystical and quietist principles in the Society of Friends at the present time. But I am sure that our Society is the natural home for the spirits of all those who hold them, for it is the one successful embodiment of these principles in

Everything, all beauty and rightness, seems to turn upon a right subordination of the outward to the inward, the transient to the permanent, in our lives and thoughts. Yet this right subordination cannot be achieved in a hurry. If we are to learn to assign to the weightiest matters their true place and predominance, we must allow ourselves, or rather we must steadily resolve to secure for ourselves, quietness enough not only to know our own minds, but to listen to the still small voice of conscience, or of God, speaking in our own hearts.

In other words, we must secure space for that which is to the devout soul as the very breath of life. I mean the practice of prayer. As our thought of prayer deepens, and that it does so is one of the most thankworthy results of the struggle for light through which we are passing, or have passed, as it deepens from petition to communion, from the use of forms of words to the upward striving of the spirit, it becomes less and less a mark of division, more and more the secret of uniting power. The deepest prayer is not that which is most freely and frequently uttered. That prayer which springs from the depths of silence, not mere silence of the lips, but silence of the very heart before God, this deepest prayer has in it a power to melt all the barriers which may seem to divide one from another of the upward-looking children of the Father of Spirits.

I believe that the permanent effect for good or for evil of the present shaking and upheaval of thought amongst us must be mainly determined by its relation to prayer. No immediate result of the outbreak of free discussion of all things in heaven and earth has been so agonizing to devout persons, nor so gravely threatens spiritual health, as the paralysis which it has seemed to bring upon the spirit of prayer. We meet daily with open denials of the reasonableness of prayer — of the possibility of entering into any real communication with the Divine being. Few amongst

But here I am aware of being near the treacherous ground of idiosyncrasy, and I do not wish to press the point.

Prayer

Hitherto I have been speaking of our meetings for public worship. But, as Friends love to say, our worship does not begin when we sit down together in our public assemblies, nor end when we leave them. The worship in spirit and in truth is in no way limited by time and place. The same idea of a waiting “in the silence of all flesh” to hear the voice of the Lord speaking within us, characterizes the Friends’ private times of worship; or, as the more cautious expression is, of “religious retirement.” Friends are so possessed with the sense of our inability to offer acceptable prayer in our own time and will, that where others speak of family prayers, and hours of prayer or devotion, Friends prefer the expressions, “family reading” and “religious retirement.”

A silent pause before meals is the Friends’ equivalent for “saying grace” — a practice which I own I think has much to recommend it. Here, again, there is, of course, the opportunity for words, should words spontaneously arise to the lips of any of those present.

When we penetrate into the inmost chamber of private worship differences of method can no longer be traced by human eye. It is not possible for any one to judge of the practice of others in this respect; nay, there seems an impropriety in following individuals into this sacred region, even in thought. But for that very reason I may here appeal with the greater fullness of confidence to the sympathy of all who pray, in the attempt, from which I feel it impossible to refrain, to explain the way in which a belief in present inspiration is, as I think, inseparable from belief in the reality and the rightness of prayer.

a system of “Church government.” Every arrangement is made to favour and to maintain the practice of looking for individual inward guidance, and to give the freest scope to its results. Everything which tends to hinder obedience to it is abandoned and discouraged.

Conscience

Faithfulness to the light is the watchword of all who hunger and thirst after righteousness — of all seekers after the kingdom of heaven. Is this merely an equivalent for the more commonplace expression, “obedience to conscience”? Surely not. Conscience, as we all know, is liable to perversion, to morbid exaggerations, to partial insensibility, to twists and crotchets of all sorts, and itself needs correction by various external standards. Conscience, therefore, can never be our supreme and absolute guide. Whether it can ever be right to disobey it, must depend on the precise meaning we attach to the words “conscience” and “right,” and into this puzzle I have no intention of entering. In a broad and practical sense, we all know that if there were nothing above conscience, conscience would assuredly lead many of us into the ditch; nay, that, for want of enlightenment from above, it actually has led many there. The light by which our consciences must be enlightened, the light in obedience to which is our supreme good, must be something purer than this fallible faculty itself. It must be that power within us, if any such power there be, which is one with all the wisdom, all the goodness, all the order and harmony, without us; one with “the power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness”; one with “the eternal will towards all goodness.” It must be a power as all-pervading and immanent in the spirit of man as is the power of gravity (or whatever yet more elementary force gravity may be resolved into) in the outer world he inhabits. It must be the

power in which we live and move and have our being — the power and the presence of God.

To me it seems idle to attempt to find any resting-place between convinced atheism on the one hand, and absolute self-surrender to the indwelling influence of the Divine Spirit on the other; the barrier, if there be any barrier, is surely not so much a logical as a moral hindrance. Believing in God, and worshipping Him with one's whole heart, trusting Him absolutely and loving Him supremely, seem to me to be but various stages in the growth of one seed.

I believe that the difficulty of distinguishing between the will, or the voice, or the light of God, and the wills and voices and lights of a lower kind from which it is to be distinguished, is not only not to be ignored, but that the very first step towards learning the lesson is to recognize that it is a lesson, and a hard one — nay, a lifelong discipline. But just as the child trusts instinctively, absolutely, helplessly, before it has even begun to attempt to understand its parents, so, surely, we may and must trust God first and unreservedly, before we begin slowly and feebly, yet perseveringly, to acquaint ourselves with Him. And as the trust of the full-grown son or daughter is a nobler thing than the trust of the infant, so the experience of wisdom and prudence has doubtless a revelation of its own — a precious addition to that essential revelation which is made in the first place to babes, and to the wise only in so far as they too have childlike hearts. To have our senses exercised to discern between truth and falsehood, light and darkness, order and disorder, the will of God and the will of the flesh, is, I believe, the end and object of our training in this world. There is no royal road to it. Yet can we honestly say that it is impossible?

Therefore I believe that, before we can hope to enter into that intimate and blessed communion with God which

objection seems hardly intended to be seriously answered, yet I have heard it so often that I cannot but notice it. Surely it need hardly be pointed out that it applies at least equally strongly to the practice of meeting together to join in prayers, which, being already in print and chosen according to the calendar, each of us might read at home. But the worthier answer is that, whether our utterance be prearranged or spontaneous, we meet in order to kindle in each other the flame of true worship, and also to show forth our allegiance to the Master, in whom we are so united as to feel our need of each other's sympathy in drawing near to Him.

It is a familiar thought amongst Friends that no one should expect in a meeting for worship "to eat the bread of idleness." And the practice which is so frequent amongst us of ministering Friends traveling from meeting to meeting in the exercise of their gift, causes a stirring of the waters and keeps up the sense of the freedom of all to take their part whenever and wherever a word may be given them.

There is one other result of the absence of pre-arrangement in our meetings which I cannot altogether pass over. It is that no shelter is provided under cover of which one can remain in doubt whether one is or is not actually engaged in worship on one's own account. A liturgy or a hymn may bear along in its current many a vague half-formed tendency towards worship; and I dare not say that it may not thus sometimes fan the spark into a flame, or save the smoking flax from being altogether quenched. But it does seem to me that it also often prevents our recognizing our own poverty, and stifles many an individual cry for help which the sense of that poverty would tend to awaken. At any rate, the worst that can very well happen, if a silent meeting fails to help, is that it is *nothing*. It would scarcely seem possible that it should delude anyone into a hollow sense of having been engaged in a religious service.

prayer and praise springs up — but also in all the daily warfare of the Christian life.

Silence and resolution, indeed, seem almost like different aspects of the same thing. And silence is assuredly an art to be acquired, a discipline to be steadily practised, before it can become the instinctive habit and unfailing resource of the soul.

The connection between our practice of silence and our belief in inspiration is, I think, obvious. How can we listen if we do not cease to speak? How can we receive while we maintain an incessant activity?

As I have already said, I do not feel that ours is the only lawful manner of worship; I do not even think it at all clear that it would be for all people and at all times the most helpful. But I do believe it to be the purest conceivable. I am jealous for its preservation from any admixture of adventitious “aids to devotion.” I believe that its absolute freedom and flexibility, its unrivalled simplicity and gravity, make it a vessel of honour prepared in an especial manner for the conveyance of the pure water of life to many in these days who are hindered from satisfying their souls’ thirst by questionable additions to the essence of Divine worship.

I know that, in Friends’ meetings as elsewhere, one must be prepared to meet with much human weakness and imperfection; many things may be heard in them which are trying to the flesh — yes, and perhaps to the spirit also. Certainly many things may be heard which are open to criticism from an intellectual and literary point of view. Let no one go to Friends’ meetings with the expectation of finding everything to his taste. But criticism fades away abashed in the presence of what is felt to be a real, however faltering, endeavour to open actual communication with the Father of spirits, and with each other as in His presence and in His name.

People have said to me again and again, if you want to be silent, why cannot you be silent at home? Such an

transfigures all life, two great conditions must be fulfilled. We must have settled it in our hearts that everything, from the least to the greatest, is to be taken as His language — language which it is our main business here to learn to interpret — and we must be willing to face all pain as His discipline.

Those who are looking for smooth roads and luxurious resting-places may well say they perceive no sign of guidance at all. The Divine guidance is away from self-indulgence, often away from outward success; through humiliation and failure, and many snares and temptations; over rough roads and against opposing forces — always uphill. Its evidence of success is in the inmost, deepest, most spiritual part of our experience.

Worship

That mysterious diversity which is interwoven with all our likeness, and belongs to the very nature common to us all makes it impossible for one to judge for another as to the manner of worship most likely to be vitally helpful to him. I cannot tell how far my own feeling about Friends’ meetings may arise from an idiosyncrasy. I do not pretend to feel, as did some of the early Friends, that all pre-arrangement is in itself unlawful or sinful. But it seems to me that nothing but silence can heal the wounds made by disputations in the region of the unseen. No external help, at any rate, has ever in my own experience proved so penetratingly efficacious as the habit of joining in a public worship based upon silence. Its primary attraction for me was in the fact that it pledged me to nothing, and left me altogether undisturbed to seek for help in my own way. But before long I began to be aware that the united and prolonged silences had a far more direct and powerful effect than this. They soon began to exercise a strangely subduing and softening

effect upon my mind. There used, after a while, to come upon me a deep sense of awe, as we sat together and waited — for what? In my heart of hearts I knew in whose Name we were met together, and who was truly in the midst of us. Never before had His influence revealed itself to me with so much power as in those quiet assemblies.

And another result of the practice of silent waiting for the unseen Presence proved to be a singularly effectual preparation of mind for the willing reception of any words which might be offered “in the name of a disciple.” The words spoken were indeed often feeble, and always inadequate (as all words must be in relation to Divine things), sometimes even entirely irrelevant to my own individual needs, though at other times profoundly impressive and helpful; but, coming as they did after the long silences which had fallen like dew upon the thirsty soil, they went far deeper, and were received into a much less thorny region than had ever been the case with the words I had listened to from the pulpit.

In Friends’ meetings also, from the fact that every one is free to speak, one hears harmonies and correspondences between very various utterances such as are scarcely to be met with elsewhere. It is sometimes as part-singing compared with unison. The free admission of the ministry of women, of course, greatly enriches this harmony. I have often wondered whether some of the motherly counsels I have listened to in our meeting would not reach some hearts that might be closed to the masculine preacher.

Silence

But it is not only the momentary effect of silence as a help in public worship that constitutes its importance in Quaker estimation. The silence we value is not the mere outward silence of the lips. It is a deep quietness of heart and mind,

a laying aside of all preoccupation with passing things — yes, even with the workings of our own minds; a resolute fixing of the heart upon that which is unchangeable and eternal. This “silence of all flesh” appears to us to be the essential preparation for any act of true worship. It is also, we believe, the essential condition at all times of inward illumination. “Stand still in the light,” says George Fox again and again, and then strength comes — and peace and victory and deliverance, and all other good things.

The possibilities of inward silence can be but distantly referred to in words. The clearness of inward vision which sometimes results from it must be experienced to be fully understood; the things revealed to that vision are rather to be lived in than uttered. But the fact that a strenuous endeavour to lay aside all disturbing influences, and to allow all external vibrations to subside, is an important, if not an essential, preparation for the reception of eternal truth, seems to be indisputable. To be quiet must surely always be a gain. To rule one’s own spirit, and to acquire the power of proclaiming at least a truce within, must surely be recognized by the least “mystical” as a rational and wholesome exercise of self-control.

It is, to my own mind, a singular confirmation of the depth of truth in the Quaker ideal, that it embraces in its application such widely varying degrees of spirituality. The “inward silence” which to the mystic means the gateway of the unspeakable, the limpid calmness of the mirror in which heaven’s glory is to be reflected, commends itself also to the sternest rationalist as the beginning of fortitude. And the experience of some of us (whom I may, perhaps, venture to describe as rational mystics) proves the exceeding value of the habit of seeking after inward silence as a real life-discipline. Not only at the times set apart for definite acts of worship — though, whether in public or in private, it is from the heart of this stillness that the voice of deepest