

Let Your Lives Speak

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LET YOUR LIVES SPEAK

HERE OR NEAR THIS ROCK GEORGE FOX
PREACHED TO ABOUT ONE THOUSAND
SEEKERS FOR THREE HOURS ON SUNDAY
JUNE 13, 1652. GREAT POWER INSPIRED HIS
MESSAGE AND THE MEETING PROVED OF
FIRST IMPORTANCE IN GATHERING THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS KNOWN AS QUAKERS.
MANY MEN AND WOMEN CONVINCED OF THE
TRUTH ON THIS FELL AND IN OTHER PARTS
OF THE NORTHERN COUNTIES WENT
THROUGH THE LAND AND OVER THE SEAS
WITH THE LIVING WORD OF THE LORD
ENDURING GREAT HARDSHIPS AND WINNING
MULTITUDES TO CHRIST.

- From a tablet on a great rock known as
"Fox's Pulpit," near Firbank Fell, England

Editor's Note

THREE hundred years ago a man strode across the English countryside, and in the vigor and power of his passing, a new spiritual movement was born. It was in 1652 that George Fox, shoemaker, shepherd, felt so deeply the necessity to tell of the Truth and Light within that he brought his message wherever groups would hear him. Many who listened were ready and waiting for such a voice. Small earnest groups had met together in silent searching. Their eagerness caught fire at the flame brought by Fox and his friends.

Among those who joined the group was Margaret Fell, wife of Judge Fell of Swarthmoor Hall. Their home became a haven for early Friends, and Margaret was of the number whose courageous stand for Truth brought imprisonment and persecution. Eleven years after the death of Judge Fell, Margaret married George Fox.

In the summer of 1952 Quakers from many countries gathered at Oxford, England for the Tercentenary Conference of the Religious Society of Friends. While their primary endeavor was to renew their own experience of the Light and to assess their mission in today's world, in their thoughts they turned often to the past.

In this pamphlet an English Quaker recreates for us some of the happenings of 1652 in the northwest country where she makes her home and calls attention to the meanings and challenges for us in the vitality of those early days.

“THE Kingdom of Heaven did gather us, and catch us all, as in a net,” wrote Francis Howgill, when describing what happened in 1652 to a group of men and women in a remote corner of the northwest of England, completely changing their humdrum, workaday lives; sending some to preach the gospel, some to prison, some to the far ends of the earth and some to death; calling all to live on a new heroic plane in a new warmth of spiritual fellowship. “The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us,” he wrote, looking back upon the whole thing almost wistfully, and trying to explain what it was that had set their hearts aflame, though he little knew how desperately his spiritual descendants would seek the key to that sublime experience. There was no other way of expressing it. The Kingdom of Heaven had gathered them and, as a result, they “came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in.”

Nearly three hundred years later, in 1920, the Friends attending the first World Conference declared that to follow the way of Christ involved living here and now “as though the Kingdom of God had come.” For those who have been gathered up into the Kingdom, there will surely be no other way. Nevertheless, the keys of the Kingdom too often elude all but the rarer spirits among us. That is why it repays us to study the events and personalities of 1652 more closely, for then not only the rarer spirit, but all were gathered into the new life.

The Challenge Of Obedience

It is customary, when describing the events of 1652, to start with the vision on Pendle Hill. A closer study of the words of George Fox’s Journal suggests a different starting point: “I was moved of the Lord.” Divorced from its contemporary setting, this might be taken as a piece of picturesque phraseology, or as the natural utterance of a

man accustomed to express himself in religious terms. Countless people climb Pendle Hill today without waiting for the Lord to move them to it. They climb because climbing is a popular pastime, or because they want to enjoy the view, or simply for the pleasure of the exercise.

In the seventeenth century climbing was not a popular pastime. Men climbed for business, not for pleasure. Shepherds climbed to gather up their sheep, miners and quarrymen to seek out the treasures of the hills, soldiers to outflank their enemies and outlaws to outwit theirs; everyday men and women considered they had something better to do. Even within living memory, climbers in the Pendle district were often regarded as a little mad. "Hasta nivver thowt," said one local worthy to a Quaker enthusiast, "if God 'ad meant yon mountains to be walked on, 'E'd 'a' put 'em lower down?"

Nor in the seventeenth century did people usually climb to enjoy a view, especially a mountain view. As for the joy of the exercise, they took their pleasure and their exercise in other ways. But least of all would any man climb Pendle for pleasure. Pendle was a place of ill repute, a haunt of witches and warlocks. Earlier in the century the trial of the Pendle witches had taken place at Lancaster, followed by the ghastly hangings at the place of execution high above the Lune. Men might well have asked in the seventeenth century: "Can any good thing come out of Pendle?"

When George Fox, years after the event, recorded that on a certain day in 1652 he was "moved of the Lord" to climb Pendle Hill, he was making no perfunctory statement. Consciously or unconsciously, he was recording the fact that as a young man he had done an apparently senseless thing because he had been impelled by God's guidance to do it. Pendle Hill was not on his route. He did not have to climb it as one climbs a steep pass in the Lake District, because only by so doing can one reach one's destination.

The bare ridge of Pendle rises starkly from the plain; the little stone-built villages encircle it and the narrow roads string out between them. Pendle itself is left to the sheep and the pewits — and the witches, some might have added in the old days.

Thus the events of 1652 are challenging at the very outset. The beginning of that overwhelming experience of the Kingdom of Heaven which transformed men and women till they lived in it for the rest of their days was simply this: one man was so utterly dependent on the guidance of God that he forsook the safe road for the barren mountain and for no other reason than that God had led him there.

One inescapable conclusion is that a vision has to be earned. Who knows on what far mountain of the spirit the vision for our own day awaits us? It may be there even now, in place, in space, in time, but to behold it the seeker, or group of seekers, must accept the same challenge, the same inspired madness. The safe road which George Fox forsook on an apparent impulse was a useful road with a sure destination where lived people he could serve; the barren mountain held out no promise of usefulness or service.

To any but a prophet the choice would have seemed obvious and the choice would have been wrong. Our road three hundred years later may not be safe but it certainly seems useful and leads us in the way of some service to others; but can we be sure that we walk it with a sensitive spirit, ready to leave it for the barren mountain if the Lord wills it so? The log of the little Quaker vessel, the "Woodhouse," which was built in response to a "moving of the Lord" and subsequently sailed across the Atlantic by the guidance of God alone, records that "we saw the Lord leading our vessel as it were a man leading a horse by the head." Only so can we follow our course with certainty, for such guidance is "better than a known way."

The Challenge Of The Vision

From time to time efforts have been made to explain away George Fox's vision. Modern seekers, Quakers not excepted, sometimes have a mistrust of anything which suggests the supernatural. If we ourselves are not accustomed to seeing visions, we are tempted to reduce all our fellow-seekers to the same down-to-earth common denominator. But to understand something of George Fox's vision, even if one is not privileged to share it, one need only climb Pendle Hill on a clear day — best of all on a day in early spring, when the snows still linger on the distant heights and the wind blows over them with an exhilarating tang which sets the pulses racing. Scrambling up by the direct route, clutching the tough stems of the dense scrub of whinberry bushes as one's feet slip on the frozen slopes, one may well climb with "much ado" and spare some sympathy in passing for George Fox if he took that route in early summer wearing leather breeches.

The way is too steep, too grim, for poetic musings. That is why the breathtaking views from the summit come with such a sublime shock. Suddenly, almost without warning, the struggle is over, the world drops away, and the heavens declare the glory of God. The distant sea sparkles round the Lancashire coast; the bare fells rise one above the other, sheltering the green dales with their teeming life of grey farmhouses and barns and sheepfolds, and drawing the eye further and further to where the long string of the Lakeland hills is stretched across the northern sky.

The most prosaic soul might well sense the life in those green valleys, might well lift up his eyes unto those hills whence cometh help. Who can doubt that a prophet may do more? Surely to many there have come such moments in life, when a new sense of direction has suddenly been given. Some may receive their marching orders in a time of worship

with their fellow men; some in solitary communion with nature; some in the inspiration of the arts; others in the stirring example of a noble human life. That George Fox received his in a vision from the summit of Pendle Hill, there can be no doubt.

The challenge of that vision is still with us. At that perplexing stage of his career, George Fox desperately needed his marching orders, as we do ours in what seems to us an even more perplexing world. But having earned them by a sublime irrelevance, he not only recognised them when they came to him, but carried them out without delay.

There is a breathlessness about his record of the succeeding days, as he hurries on foot through the dales towards the place where his work is to begin. It lasts until the moment when the stranger speaks to him in the gloaming as he approaches Brigflatts, the cluster of weavers' cottages on the bank of the rushing Rawthey. "He asked me from whence I came, and I answered him: 'From the Lord.'" George Fox had earned the right to give that answer, for he indeed knew whence he came. Again the challenge remains with us. In our desperate search for our destination, or for the next stage of our journey, we may have overlooked the supreme importance of the question: "Whence come ye?" It may well be that the end is in the beginning, the beginning in the end.

The Challenge Of Recognition

At Brigflatts, at Borrat, at the crowded Whitsuntide Fair in the little grey town of Sedbergh, and on the slopes of Firbank Fell, George Fox found the "people waiting to be gathered." The recognition was mutual. The army captain who interrupted George Fox as he was preaching under the yew tree outside Sedbergh Church to the crowds who had come to the Fair, to buy or to sell, to amuse or to be amused,

to hire or to be hired, was himself interrupted by Francis Howgill who declared that George Fox was one who “spoke with authority and not as the scribes.” Again, on the following Sunday, it was Francis Howgill who, as George Fox passed by the open door of Firbank Chapel on the fellside, felt the power of the Spirit so strongly that he “might have killed him with a crab apple” – a puzzling remark to those unfamiliar with the local saying expressive of surprise: “That might ‘ave knocked me dahn wi’ a lile (little) apple!”

And when George Fox preached that afternoon from the great crag outside the building, not only the congregation of the morning but hundreds of Seekers from all the countryside around came flocking to hear him until there were a thousand men and women gathered in that lonely spot. Today Firbank Fell is lonelier even than it was then, for the population has ebbed from the dales and once you have passed the clustered farm houses on its lower slopes you may climb without meeting anybody, save a mountain shepherd gathering his sheep, or hearing anything save the bleat of a lamb or the cry of a curlew. But the seeking spirit still draws pilgrims to the place, and high on the grey crag where George Fox called a multitude to the living Christ is the memorial tablet with its stirring record and its challenging reminder: “Let Your Lives Speak.”

At Preston Patrick also the recognition was mutual. When Thomas Camm wrote down for posterity his recollections of that General Meeting of the Seekers which followed the meeting on Firbank Fell, the memory of that day was still so vivid that for a moment he was once again the twelve-year-old Tom, fidgeting on his hard bench and waiting for something to happen. For his father, John Camm, came in with the stranger, George Fox, and they sat down on a form together instead of going to the most important seat as young Tom had expected.

Through the eyes of the boy one can still see the scene in the chapel, with everybody restless and uneasy, waiting for the speaker to begin. Francis Howgill even rose in desperation and opened the Bible as if to read or expound, only to sit down again at last, perplexed and bewildered — doubtless to the secret amusement of the wondering boy. It was not until the silence deepened, until the Seekers began to seek, until the recognition was mutual, that George Fox delivered the message which swept them all, young Tom included, off their feet and made it “a day of God’s power, a notable day indeed, never to be forgotten by me Thomas Camm — I being then present at the meeting, a schoolboy of about twelve years of age.”

The seeking spirit and the recognition of the message were essential to the events of 1652, and those who today seem to have received no marching orders, who see no vision and who feel themselves to be cast in no prophetic mould, cannot escape their challenge. Three hundred years have passed and still the world needs both the seer on the mountain top and the seekers stirring in the dales.

The Challenge Of Swarthmoor Hall

It is not possible to crowd the events of 1652 within the compass of a single fortnight, as has been suggested. The culmination of George Fox’s journey was not the stirring scene outside Sedbergh Church, not the gathering on Firbank Fell and not the meeting at Preston Patrick, but the arrival at Swarthmoor Hall. The journey which starts with a “moving of the Lord” in one sensitive human soul goes from the prophetic mount, striking its trail of fire amongst the seekers along the way, until it reaches the hearthstone of a home, to burn there with a steady flame to light the centuries.

The significance of Swarthmoor Hall cannot be overlooked. More than seeking was involved and more than

recognition. Margaret Fell had been seeking the Truth of God for years; she recognised George Fox's message, not only in her home, but in the full glare of publicity in Ulverston Church, where she wept in her place of honour, exclaiming: "We are all thieves; we are all thieves; we have taken the Scriptures in words, and know nothing of them ourselves."

But above all this, it must be remembered that Swarthmoor Hall was the home of a loving, united family before it became the home of Quakerism. When, three weeks after George Fox's first visit, Judge Fell came riding homewards across the desolate Sands and was met near the Ulverston Shore by a group of grave gentlemen who gave him the sombre warning that his wife and children were bewitched, more than he knew depended upon his reaction.

The full impact of the meaning of this news is not realised by the modern reader. "Bewitched" is a more or less casual word today, but it was not so in the minds of men who could remember, or whose fathers could remember, the trials of the Pendle witches at Lancaster. Witches and warlocks were doubtless generally people of small account in the social world, the inhabitants of tumble-down cottages or crazy old buildings like the Malkin Tower on Pendle. Margaret Fell was a cultured and charming woman and mistress of a great household, but so was Alice Nutter, and Alice Nutter was hanged alongside her scarecrow companions on the great gallows outside Lancaster.

Looking back across the centuries, one realises not only what Judge Fell's actual reaction meant, but what other reactions there might have been. He might have believed the accusation, and rumour might have given rise to rumour until the angry superstition of the countryside had been aroused against Margaret Fell and her children. He might have shrugged it aside and, going home to his lovely wife, so much younger and less accustomed to the ways of the world than himself, he might have belittled her new emotions and experiences very tenderly, very masterfully, as many

have doubtless done, before and since. "And now, my dear, let's get rid of these rather impossible people and have our home to ourselves again." Instead, he chose to stand beside her, so that together they might face whatever consequences, for joy or sorrow, this new experience might bring.

The love of Thomas and Margaret Fell, the unity of the home they had created, the strength of their family life, all were big enough to stand the strain. They took in the new movement, giving it strength and stability and a haven from the storms of the outside world, and were themselves enriched thereby. The tolerance of Judge Fell, who never threw in his lot with Friends, was something miraculous in his own or any other age, and Friends have not always been prompt to remember the part that that tolerance played in shielding the flame which has never since been put out.

"Quiet" and "still" are the words which recur in Margaret Fell's description of her home on the momentous day of Judge Fell's return. "Then was he pretty moderate and quiet" — "the children were all quiet and still" — "all these things made him quiet and still" — "and so my husband came to see clearly the truth of what he spoke, and was very quiet that night, said no more, and went to bed." Everything was "quiet and still" until they had won their way through to a new understanding. It is the only way in which such a crisis in family life can be met. But it might so easily have been otherwise. There might have been an uproar, with the children taking sides; there might have been coldness and bitterness, with things said that had better have been left unsaid; instead, there was that quietness and stillness in which things have time to grow. Such an atmosphere of quietness and stillness is in itself a challenge to the Quaker homes of our turbulent modern days.

It is not long since a twentieth century Friend stood on the summit of Pendle Hill and, looking across in the direction of Swarthmoor, suddenly realised where the Swarthmoor

Halls of the fourth century of Quakerism must be built, not in any one place, or in any one country, or in any one fashion, but wherever Quaker men and women make their homes together in a love which is ready to stand the test and be enriched by what it spends.

The Challenge Of The Outgoing Spirit

After Swarthmoor came the challenge of the Sands. It was so in the seventeenth century and it remains so today. The home of Quakerism could only conserve its strength by sharing it; it could only preserve its message by spreading it; and the only way to the wider world lay across the wild and dangerous waste of the Sands of Morecambe Bay.

It would be an interesting line of research to study the vivid pictures of Swarthmoor which were preserved by those who left it, sometimes never to return. The most exquisite and living memories of Margaret Fell which remain to us are those caught up like bees in amber in the writings of Swarthmoor's voluntary exiles. It was Thomas Salthouse, erstwhile steward of Swarthmoor Hall, who referred to her in a letter as a "lily among thorns" and so caught for ever the springtime radiance that was Margaret Fell. To Thomas Salthouse, bred in Furness, a lily was not a hothouse flower, or a treasured, cultivated garden bloom. In Furness and the Lake District, and also the district on the Lancashire and Westmorland border whence came so many of the first Publishers of Truth, a lily was a wild daffodil and daffodils are called lilies in those parts to this day.

The snows linger late on the fells, where the rock scores the surface of the close-knit turf, but in sheltered corners, where the straggling brambles catch fragments of wool from the fleeces of hardy northern sheep taking refuge from the storm, the pale yellow daffodils spring up to defy the icy winds and Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one

of these. It was young Will Caton, far away in Holland, who left a picture of Margaret Fell in the great Hall at Swarthmoor which is still as clear and fresh as a Dutch interior by an Old Master, for he saw her in a vision, "spinning flax most joyfully, being clothed with honour and beauty." Did the "joyfully" mean that she was singing, one wonders, or was she laughing with her children as she spun?

The end of the journey was indeed the beginning; in truth, the two were inextricably intertwined, for those who left Swarthmoor for the ends of the earth still bore it with them in their hearts.

To stand upon the fellside near Sunbreck, where Margaret Fell lies buried, and to look across the wide expanse of the Bay to the further shore, where Lancaster raises its grim towers, and where the roads lead southward to London and out into the world, is to realise the inescapable challenge of those journeys. Across the Sands at low tide rode George Fox, singing as he went, to his trial at Lancaster and Margaret Fell to meet the supreme moment of her life when, faced by the loss of all she possessed and the threat to life itself, she made her immortal answer: "Although I am out of the King's protection, yet I am not out of the protection of Almighty God."

But the grim towers did not always entrap them. They rode across those Sands on the first stage of their missionary journeys, or Margaret, in those later, peaceful years, when she traveled south to join her second husband, George Fox, in the home of one or other of her beloved daughters. There was hardly one amongst those first Publishers of Truth who did not at some time make that journey, leaving the shelter of Swarthmoor Hall for the storms and stresses of a persecuting world. There were many who returned again, worn out with toil and suffering, to find fresh strength in the home which could accept every change of outward circumstance because its essential spirit remained the same.

There is no escaping the challenge at Swarthmoor. You have only to climb the fellside and it is there. It rings as truly in the fourth century of Quakerism as it did in the first, and with it comes the inevitable realisation which is in itself a challenge, that only the resources of the spirit are infinite and only these can build up the homes whose wealth can thus be shared.

The Challenge Of Friendship

There is another challenge which awaits those who climb the fells above Morecambe Bay, whether it be on the north shore or on the south, and look out across the glittering waste where the invisible track winds between the treacherous quicksands and across swift-flowing channels to the other side. For there, perhaps more than anywhere else on earth, one may realise what friendship meant to the Early Friends.

When Robert Widders of Kellet died, Margaret Fox recorded that if she or her daughters were in anxiety or distress, he never failed to sense it and so would set out from the far shore of the Bay, in all seasons, winter or summer, storm or calm, by day or by night, and make the dangerous crossing in order to bring to Swarthmoor the help and comfort of a friend. Such friendship did not count the cost. Moreover, such a sensitiveness was not, and is not, easily won.

It is possible to assure our friends that they are in our thoughts without meaning more than that we occasionally think of them with affection. But to hold our friends in our thoughts means more than that. It means a far more costing outgoing of the spirit, which can in very truth reach beyond human and physical limitations until we are indeed "with" them. Such an exercise of friendship was possible amongst the Early Friends. And such an exercise of friendship is an

echo of the deeper exercise of the spirit which is prayer, which in its turn can reach beyond human and physical limitations until we may take knowledge of those who know the meaning of such prayer, that they have been with Jesus.

The Challenge Of Strength

The men and women who responded to the original challenge of 1652 were a mixed company, in age, capacity and outward circumstance, but all, especially the missionary group who later came to be known as the Valiant Sixty, bore in some degree the hallmark of this sustaining friendship. All, too, were characterised by a strength akin to that of George Fox, the strength which made his jailers at Scarborough exclaim: "He is as stiff as a tree and as pure as a bell, for we could never stir him." It was not a matter of mere physical strength, though such physical strength as they possessed contributed to it. George Fox himself was a man of magnificent physique, as is proved by the very fact that he survived persecution, imprisonments and mob violence which would have crushed a less vigorous man.

One sometimes gains the impression that he was secretly a little proud of his native toughness. For instance, in his report of his encounter with the bully of Falmouth, when he was being conveyed to Launceston under guard, there is a naive satisfaction to be sensed underlying the words. "But the next morning Keate brings in his brother; a rude, wicked man, and puts him into the room and he himself stands without. And he walks huffing up and down the room and I bid him fear the Lord; and he comes upon me and struck me with both his hands and clapped his leg behind me and would fain have thrown me down, but he could not. But I stood stiff and still and let him strike."

There was only one superior strength which George Fox and others like him would recognise. The jailers at

Scarborough could not stir him, nor could the Cornish bully, but the same might have been said of him as was said of young Edward Burrough: "His very strength was bended after God." From the day of Edward Burrough's conviction at the age of nineteen to the day of his death in Newgate Gaol, those words were characteristic of his life. One gains the impression of superb physical energy and of a body presented as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which, as Paul reminds us, is our reasonable service; a life wholly transformed — "be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds." Such a life is in itself a challenge.

George Fox and Edward Burrough were endowed with physical strength above the average, but it was not physical strength alone that lay behind the living sacrifice. There was a sense of direction, a capacity for putting first things first, which is perhaps best expressed in a contemporary tribute to another member of the Valiant Sixty, Robert Widders. Like so many of the facts one learns about Robert Widders, it brings home relentlessly the personal responsibility of each individual member of a movement. Robert Widders was seldom in the limelight. Much that we know about him has had to be deduced. But there can be few amongst us who would not wish that such scattered actions of their own as may chance to be recorded might be worthy of the same deductions. The love for him in his own Meeting which the centuries have not quenched; the dependence placed upon him by George Fox; the warmth of Margaret Fell's friendship for him; all these bear the same witness. And above all comes this tribute: "He ever preferred the Lord's business before his own and never lost an inch of ground." The two hang together. The first makes the second possible.

But it is no easier to accept the fact in the twentieth century than it was in the seventeenth. In spite of our longing to advance the cause of God's Kingdom, the temptation to

be a spare-time worker still persists. But we can only carry out the ideal of the First World Conference, to live as if the Kingdom of God had come, if we do indeed ever prefer the Lord's business before our own, and only by so doing will we never lose an inch of ground. The challenge of the unassuming life of Robert Widders was simply this, that he knew of no half-measures in the putting on of the full armour of God.

Among those pioneer Friends who were gathered in 1652 and caught "as in a net," there was to be found the physical strength which is "bended after God," and the strength of purpose which can always put the Lord's business first, but beyond these there was another strength which was common to all in some degree. All three are needed in the world today, but perhaps the average man or woman is most conscious of the need for the third, or rather, possibly, of the evidences of the lack of it.

It is the strength that his friends sensed in Richard Hubberthorne of Yealand, as he lay dying in Newgate, where he had deliberately chosen to be in the worst part of the gaol, in the hope of bringing some help and comfort to those who were suffering there. "One could feel his strength in the still spirit that kept him." That is the strength which cannot fail, the strength of the man or woman whose mind is stayed on God. And this inward strength gives to its possessor an outward calm which can be recognised and which seems to troubled and turbulent souls something infinitely desirable, like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

To live in the Kingdom of God is to know the peace of God which passeth all understanding, to possess the pearl of great price for which the merchants of this world would gladly sell all that they have, if they might only purchase it; but it is not a treasure lightly to be won. Those who possess it never fear the ocean of darkness and death which George

Fox saw, and which we in our turn have seen, because they never fail to see the ocean of love and light which will overflow it. They see the ocean of love and light, not because they are a prey to easy optimism, but because they themselves are part of that ocean of love and light and their strength is swallowed up in it, whether they live or die. They live as if the Kingdom of God had come, and they die strong in the still spirit that keeps them. That is the source of George Fox's confidence when he bids Friends: "Sing and rejoice, ye children of the day and of the light, for the Lord is at work in this thick darkness that can be felt and Truth doth flourish as the Rose." Again, it is no easy optimism. To know the Lord is at work, you have to be at work with the Lord.

The Challenge Of Steadfastness

Some well-known verses of Longfellow's tell us that

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time.

However wholeheartedly we may be in accord with the first two lines, few of us expect to leave lasting traces on the sands of time. That is why it is helpful occasionally to remember those other, nameless ones who lie in many a forgotten Quaker burial ground, such as the one at Crook, near Edward Burroughs native village of Underbarrow, where there is never a sound to be heard save for the bleating of the Herdwick sheep or the singing of the larks overhead; or Chapel Hill, to the south of Pendle, where two of the martyrs from Lancaster Castle were laid to rest after their friends had carried them all the way from Lancaster on their shoulders so that they might be buried near those who had loved them.

Most of the Seekers whose hearts were touched in 1652 came to know the grim interior of Lancaster Castle. The old Dungeon Tower where George Fox was imprisoned, and which he described so vividly in his Journal, has been pulled down long since, but other places of imprisonment remain within the castle walls to bear witness to the fortitude of those who suffered there for their faith. Well might such Lancaster Friends as remained free for the time being, busy themselves with charitable efforts to keep the helpless prisoners supplied with food and blankets and candles; it was thanks to their endeavours that more of the captives did not forfeit their lives in the struggle for liberty.

There can be few Friends' meetings in the "1652 country" which do not number amongst their founders men and women who literally took their lives in their hands every time they attended a meeting for worship. In fields and barns and farmhouse kitchens they gathered, and from fields and barns and farmhouse kitchens they were taken, without warning and without pity, to be imprisoned for weeks and months without trial.

There is still in existence a petition signed by a number of such Friends, some of whom had been imprisoned for fourteen weeks, and some longer, asking the justices for their right as Englishmen to be tried. They explained that they were "husbandmen and tradesmen upon whose Diligence and Dayly labour ye Subsistence of our families as to ye outward Consists, the neglect whereof may in likelihood Impoverish them and us, and so bring an Unnecessary Charge and burthen upon others." It was the plain duty of the Justices to give them a fair trial without further delay: it was equally their duty to set them free, for they had wronged no man. They asked no more than that. "Wee Desire nothing from you but yt wee may live quietly and peaceably in our owne houses, Eate our own bread and follow our owne Callings in the feare of God for the good of all; and to mete together to serve and worship our God

according as hee requireth of us.” That, surely, was simple justice. “But,” they added, “if you will not Grant these things unto us, then shall wee lye downe in the peace of our God and patiently Suffer under you.”

That was the spirit which finally broke down the persecution, The men and women who left their footprints on the sands of Time, George Fox, Margaret Fell, Francis Howgill, Edward Burrough, Richard Hubberthorne and the rest, could not have done it alone. Behind them stood the ones who have left no memorial, who are perished as if they had never been: men and women who snatched a scanty living from little hill farms, who kept small village shops, who tended sheep, and who were prepared to face the loss of all, to jeopardise everything they held dear, for the sake of an ideal; for a liberty which they themselves might never live to enjoy; for a victory which, for anything they knew, might never be won. “But if you will not Grant these things unto us, then shall wee lye downe in the peace of our God and patiently Suffer under you” deserves to be placed beside the declaration of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

The Challenge Of The Sowing

In the present time of international tension and danger, it is surely fitting for us to remember that the pioneers of Quakerism could not know for certain that victory would be theirs. Like the good farmers that so many of them were, they sowed the seeds without asking whether they themselves would reap the harvest. Some of them were never to know how far their influence would reach.

Not far from Preston Patrick stands Camsgill, the little grey farmhouse which was the home of John and Mabel and Thomas Camm. When John left it for the West of England, it must have cost them a struggle. Possibly they prayed that the sacrifice might indeed prove to have been worth while. When he returned home for the last time, worn out and broken in health, to die with his own folk, in sight of his own green fields with the little stream running through them which still sounds so sweetly on the ear, he may well have been content as he remembered those stirring days at Bristol, when he and his beloved friend, John Audland, had shared their vision with countless eager Seekers.

But the most far-reaching results of his work were never to be known to him in life. They would flower, not by Severn and Avon, but by Delaware and Schuylkill. They would spring, not from success at Bristol, but from failure at Oxford. For there he had fired the soul of one man, the tradesman Thomas Loe, who would later be called to Ireland, there to encounter William Penn. The narrow track which leaves Camsgill leads straight to Pennsylvania. The honest farmer who lies in an unmarked grave at Birkrigg Park may well rest content with the harvest of his sowing.

The Challenge Of Joy

The final challenge of 1652 is one which has for too long remained unanswered in the history of Quakerism. It springs from the note of joy which characterised the early pioneers, in their lives, their service and their message. Francis Howgill's record of those first days is shot through and through with pure joy: "The Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement, and great admiration, insomuch that we often said one unto another, with great joy of heart, 'What? Is the Kingdom of God come to be with men?' "

The remembrance of the early meetings at Bristol never ceased to rejoice the heart of John Audland — “ Ah! those great meetings in the Orchard at Bristol I may not forget” — and that this was no passing emotional fervour is proved by the fact that a few years later, Bristol Friends were able to assure the authorities that they might as well try to hinder the sun from shining or the tide from flowing as attempt to prevent them from meeting together to worship God.

The joy of Thomas Briggs’ message could not be quenched by persecution. Thomas Briggs came from Bolton-le-Sands, a village mid-way between Lancaster and Carnforth. He was convinced at George Fox’s first trial at Lancaster Castle, when he preached in the open court. It is more than likely that Thomas Briggs attended the trial out of curiosity, or even for fun, as a young man might drop in to watch a football match today. The vicar of Bolton-le-Sands, John Jacques, was a staunch opponent of George Fox and was there to see him discomfited.

However, not only were the charges proved to be false, but Colonel West, one of the justices, openly rejoiced to see “so many sober people and good faces together” and invited George Fox to preach to them. John Jacques lost at least one parishioner that day, for Thomas Briggs promptly threw in his lot with Friends. Later he founded the meeting at Manchester and there, when he was imprisoned in a filthy dungeon, “the Lord was so with him that he sang for joy.”

Similar songs were sung by two Westmorland women Friends, Margaret Newby and Elizabeth Cowart, in the stocks at Evesham, where they were cruelly fastened in a way calculated to cause them the maximum of pain and discomfort, and left for seventeen hours. All night long, in the depth of winter, they suffered there, and yet they were “moved eternally by the Lord to sing.”

Such songs of joy were no mere surface expression. They sprang from the very heart of that joy which “no man

taketh from you,” and because of that they were irresistible and unquenchable. The spirit of the early days of Quakerism will not be fully renewed in the fourth century of its history until the full secret of that joy is rediscovered and expressed anew, and until we are indeed fully convinced that nothing, “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“Come From The Four Winds”

The winter months are long in the north-west of England, whence first came the challenges of 1652. Even when the woods are thickly carpeted with snowdrops and the pale yellow aconites star the ground under the trees, the snows return and the wind blows coldly across the frozen hills. Then come the first wild daffodils to herald the tardy spring and give promise of new life, and Friends are reminded once again of Margaret Fell, the “lily among thorns.” The snows may return again and again in our hearts and in our lives, but still the promise of new life is there. It is never too late to begin living as though the Kingdom of God had come.

The world today is hag-ridden by fear, as if indeed the witches and warlocks of old Pendle had come to life, to execute a fearsome vengeance on mankind. One is irresistibly reminded of the story of John Crook, the honoured Justice turned Quaker, who spent a night in a haunted room where he awoke at about one o'clock “with the overflowings of sweetness and peace covering his mind and such intimations of divine favour as greatly refreshed him.” Then, in the long passage outside his room, he heard strange sounds, a dismal groaning and a rattling of chains, drawing nearer and nearer till they reached his very door, to be followed by silence, a silence fraught with dread. At last a voice sounded at the

keyhole: "You are damned! You are damned! You are damned!" John Crook, his mind still filled with those "overflowings of sweetness and peace," sat up in bed in the moonlit room. "Thou'rt a liar!" he cried. "Thou'rt a liar! For I feel this moment the sweet peace of my God flow through my heart!" There were no more voices at the keyhole. And in the end it proved to have been a very human ghost, whose nefarious plots were blown sky-high because one man had been courageous enough to nail the lie instead of cowering under the bed-clothes.

The situation is not unfamiliar to us today. There is no lack of voices wailing at the keyholes of the world: "You are damned! You are damned! You are damned!" And mankind cowers in an agony for want of the men and women who will nail the lie. It cannot be done in bravado. Only "the overflowings of sweetness and peace," the "intimations of divine favour" give the right to fling back the answer: "Thou'rt a liar!"

Where are those "overflowings of sweetness and peace" to be found? We look back across three hundred years of history, like Ezekiel when he beheld the valley of dry bones. The bones of history can indeed be very dry. But if some Ezekiel were to rise up amongst us and prophesy upon those bones, we might find ourselves gathered together and caught up by the same spirit, so that we might "know a place to stand in," a sure place from which to fling back our answer to the twentieth century witches and warlocks who throng the thick darkness that can be felt. If we could take up the challenges of 1652, we should know that the Lord is at work in the darkness; that the ocean of love and light is unquenchable, yesterday, today and forever; that whatever may befall us, our joy no man taketh from us; and so we could answer; "Thou'rt a liar!"

To take up those challenges is not impossible. We may not be chosen to receive God's marching orders or to see

the vision from afar, but we may well be the seekers, ready to be caught up in the net; from our homes, wherever they may be, the loving, uniting spirit of Swarthmoor may overflow into a hungry world; the sustaining friendship of the pioneers may warm our hearts; we too may, be “stiff as a tree and pure as a bell,” and break the hold of winter on a frozen world like the wild daffodils in the brambles; we too may know the strength which is bended after God, which puts the Lord’s business first, which is founded on the still spirit that keeps us; ours may be the courage which can say: “But if not, then will we lie down in the peace of our God and patiently suffer under you”; ours the faith which does not ask to see the harvest of its sowing; ours the joy that sings in the dark places of the earth because even they are filled with the glory of God. The challenges of 1652 are inescapable and they are with us now.

“Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live.”