

How They Became Friends

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR This is Howard Brinton's 12th Pendle Hill Pamphlet, four of which are still available: *Guide to Quaker Practice, Quakerism and Other Religions, Quaker Education* (\$1.00) and *The Society of Friends* (10 cents.) A teacher of mathematics and physics as well as religion, Howard Brinton has been a professor or lecturer at Guilford, Earlham, Mills, Haverford and Bryn Mawr Colleges, and at Woodbrooke, one of the Selly Oak Colleges in England. His *Friends for 300 Years* is a Quaker classic. Howard Brinton was Director of Pendle Hill from 1936 to 1952. Now Director Emeritus, he continues to give a class on the Faith and Practice of the Society of Friends to the Pendle Hill community.

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Preface

The nucleus of the following essay was an address delivered at Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends. The recent evolution of this West Coast group and the similar growth which is taking place in many parts of the United States and elsewhere parallel in contemporary terms the development of the early Society of Friends.

It is hoped that this pamphlet may be useful to individuals and meetings on the growing edge of Quakerism because, though the 20th century differs radically from the 17th, the methods by which the Society of Friends is growing today do not differ essentially from those of the earliest times. The opportunities open to the founders of the Society of Friends are open to us now and their methods are still applicable.

This study may also be useful to readers who are not Friends but who are interested in religion based on inward life. As a contribution to the history of religion and particularly to that much misunderstood form of religion called mysticism, it may supply relevant information. Historians, if they notice Quakerism at all, tend to neglect what might be called its inner side. This is not surprising because the inner side is subjective and largely incommunicable. Yet the results of the Quaker movement, particularly in early America where Quakers at one time or another governed five of the colonies, cannot be understood without reference to the inward experiences out of which their equalitarian and democratic ideas arose.

Mysticism is an element in every form of religion. The Quaker Journals or spiritual autobiographies quoted here are as valuable a source of material on the history and nature of mysticism as are the writings of many more widely known mystics.

H. H. B.

I

The means by which a religious movement extends its membership determine to a large degree the nature of the movement. If a religion is propagated by sermons and evangelistic appeals it will tend to rely on words in its worship and it will have recourse to verbal formulae, even though it may have begun with different tendencies and principles. If it is propagated by lectures, discussions, books, and pedagogic methods it will tend to be intellectual. If it depends on the appeal of ritual, it will become liturgical, however clearly it may be aware of the emptiness of symbols when they become outworn or dissociated from that which they symbolize. We are here reminding ourselves of the fact, well known but often overlooked, that the means determine the end.

From the outset of the Quaker movement in the middle of the 17th century meetings for worship were based on silence, a silence frequently, but by no means always, broken by spoken words. For this statement we have ample evidence in early Quaker literature. How can such a religion be propagated? Yet propagated it was with power and success, despite extreme persecution by Church and State. How can a religion based primarily on an attempt to heed the voice of God within the soul be communicated to others by any outward means? We are thinking not only of its communication to the public, but also to the oncoming generation of its own members.

The claim has frequently been made that early Quakerism spread through evangelism, meaning by that term, fervent preaching to large gatherings. Some Quakers today look back on the beginning as a time when powerful orators converted thousands by their eloquence. These people are saddened because we have no such preachers today. Quaker historians, like all historians, are tempted to emphasize the dramatic for, quite properly, they must

make their books interesting if they are to be read. There was much that was highly dramatic in the early years of the Quaker movement. So called "public Friends" addressed crowds of eager hearers in London, Bristol and elsewhere.

There was preaching along the streets, in market places and in orchards. There were also frequent attempts to speak during regular church services after the minister had finished, a practice generally allowed during the Commonwealth period. Sometimes Quakers attempted to speak even before the minister had finished, which was not tolerated. These public appearances often resulted in physical abuse and imprisonment. Dramatic circumstances were also associated with the incredibly stubborn but passive resistance to persecution: whipping, stoning, fines, imprisonment, banishment. There is no more striking example of civil disobedience to laws which could not be conscientiously obeyed. This refusal not only brought with it complete financial ruin but also long years of imprisonment in filthy dungeons to many thousands of Friends. Such events as Joseph Besse records in his "Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers" make the story of early Quakerism a stirring and inspiring record. By comparison, our present record seems weak and ineffectual.

But a careful scrutiny of early Quakerism shows that spectacular events did not constitute the heart and core of the movement. Its real strength lay in the quiet inconspicuous growth of small meetings in many homes where sometimes as few as three or four waited upon God in silence until one of those present felt moved to speak. Often there was no speaking at all. These small home meetings constituted the seed-bed out of which the Quaker movement grew. This being true, the proclaiming of the message to great crowds was not, and could not have been, the primary factor in the early growth of Quakerism. It was

necessary then as now that the means be consistent with the end.

Such being the case, the method of propagating the faith most often used by the early Friends is not as different from what is possible today as is sometimes supposed. This same method has produced many of the nearly 200 new meetings in America and others in Europe and Asia during the last half-century, meetings which have preserved the type of worship characteristic of early Quakerism, the type, one must say, but not always the same degree of depth and solemnity.

The absence of preachers, comparable in quality to those of the seventeenth century, is not necessarily a serious handicap. It may even be an advantage if great preaching leads to too much dependence on words and insufficient reliance on cultivation of the inward life of the Spirit.

Fortunately we have ample material on why and how people became Friends in the 17th century. This material includes a collection of eye-witness accounts of the beginning of nearly every meeting in England, issued under the title *The First Publishers of Truth*. Besides this, there are journals or spiritual autobiographies, sometimes covering nearly the whole of the writer's life and sometimes only that part which portrays his early struggle for enlightenment until he finally accepts the Light as his guide and joins the Quaker movement. We cannot in this connection use the word "conversion." In the main Friends considered conversion a gradual process, often life-long, subsequent to conviction of the truth of Quaker principles. Acceptance of the Light was followed by a struggle to come fully under its influence and power, a struggle never omitted from the Journals. This struggle often took place in the small silent meeting for worship.

Twenty-six journals were published between 1689 and 1725; fourteen appeared later, written by Friends whose

life-work lay in the early epoch. We have also, for the period 1652 to 1720, about forty short accounts of the writers' acceptance of the Inward Light after a period of search and inward conflict.² The book already mentioned, *The First Publishers of Truth*, contains reports asked for by London Yearly Meeting through a questionnaire which contained nineteen questions about the way in which meetings in England were started and "settled," to use a contemporary phrase, to be answered by someone who saw what happened, even though he was a boy at that time. Reports, ninety in number, came in slowly between 1680 and 1720. They were not printed until 1907. There is no more exact account of the beginnings of Quakerism.

I have examined most of these journals and partial journals. They indicate that a majority of the original Friends came into the movement neither through speech alone nor silence alone, but by just the right combination of both. At the outset there were many seeking souls who arrived at the Quaker position alone and later discovered the Quaker movement and associated themselves with it. There was no formal membership before 1737. But those who made this independent discovery seldom realized all of its implications before they became Quakers. It was the genius of George Fox that brought together into a coordinated whole the religious insights of many isolated individuals.

That the early Quaker meetings for worship always began with a period of silence, sometimes a long period, is amply evident both from the Journals and *The First Publishers of Truth*. George Whitehead (1636-1722), who might be called the leading Friend after the death of George Fox, began his travels in the ministry in 1652 at the age of sixteen. He writes in his Journal:

After some time that I was conversant among
our Friends, and frequented the meetings to

which I belonged, both in Westmoreland and Yorkshire...chiefly between the years 1652 and 1654, being much inwardly exercised in waiting upon the Lord among them, where we had little preaching, but our meetings kept much and often in *Silence*, or but few words declared, the Lord was pleased sometimes by his Power and Word of Life, both to tender and open my heart and understanding, so that he gave me (among some others) now and then a few words livingly to utter...

It was out of these, and such our frequently silent meetings, the Lord was pleased to raise up and bring forth living witnesses, faithful ministers and true prophets...

Oh! thus keeping silence before the Lord and thus drawing near to him in a true silent frame of Spirit, to hear first what the Lord speaks to us, before we speak to others...³

George Whitehead's long Journal is filled with accounts of his struggles with government on behalf of persecuted Quakers (he appealed to six successive rulers of England), yet his extraordinary activity was inspired by what he received in the meeting for worship. It was out of these meetings, rather than from the large assemblies addressed by orators, that leaders were raised up.

It is true that some Friends were genuine orators and could address large assemblies with great power, but we find here, too, a dependence on the small silent meeting. Edward Burrough, a powerful speaker who was called "Son of Thunder and Consolation," writes in 1658 in what was probably the first attempt to give an historical account of the rise of the Quaker movement:

We met together often, and waited upon the Lord in pure silence, from our own words, and all

men's words, and hearkened to the word of the Lord, and felt his word in our hearts...And while waiting upon the Lord in silence, as often we did for many hours together, with our minds and hearts toward him, being stayed in the Light of Christ within us, from all thoughts, fleshly motions, and desires, in our diligent waiting and fear of his name, and hearkening to his Word, we received often the pouring down of the Spirit upon us, and the gift of God's holy, eternal Spirit, as in the days of old, and our hearts were made glad and our tongues loosed, and our mouths opened, and we spake with new tongues as the Lord gave us utterance, and as his Spirit led us.⁴

Here we have a powerful orator who died in prison, rating his own impressive gift as of secondary importance. His companion, Francis Howgill, who also died in prison, was another speaker who addressed great crowds in London. He writes in his "Testimony concerning Edward Burrough":

The Lord of Heaven and Earth we found to be near at hand; and as we waited upon him in pure silence, our minds out of all things, his Dreadful Power, and Glorious Majesty, and Heavenly Presence appeared in our assemblies, when there was no language, tongue or speech from any creature, and the Kingdom of Heaven did gather us, and catch us all, as in a net; and His heavenly Power at one time drew many hundreds to land...⁵

From this it would appear that the "many hundreds" were drawn more by the numinous power of the silence than by speech.

Such statements as these, written by the two greatest speakers at the so-called "threshing meetings" in London would indicate that such meetings were not what have been

called revival meetings. This is confirmed in letters written to George Fox by Anthony Pearson in 1654. He says of the people of London:

...to speak to that in their consciences, to the raising up of the witness, to let them see themselves; and...to keep them under from disputing and questioning. This we found the most profitable ministry; and few words must be used; for they have [held] the Truth in notions; and all cry out, "What do these men say more than others have said": but to bring them to silence confounds their wisdom.⁶

John Burnyeat, convinced in 1653, writes of the early Quaker meetings:

How were our hearts melted as wax, and our souls poured out as water before the Lord, and our spirits as oil, frankincense and myrrh, offered up unto the Lord as sweet incense, when not a word outwardly in all our assembly had been uttered!

...we met together and waited together in silence: it may be sometimes not a word in our meetings for months; but everyone that was faithful waited upon the living word in our own hearts...⁷

Luke Howard, a shoemaker, father of the Dover meeting and an early convert, writes:

I may acquaint you a little how things were with us in our first convincement and meetings, after we came to sit down and wait upon the Lord in silence; which was our practice for some years, except when some travelling Friends came amongst us. I can truly say that the Lord was our teacher and his presence and power were

manifested amongst us when no words have been sounded in our outward ears.⁸

Such expressions, among many others that might be selected, were written of that early period in Quaker history which seems so stormy and full of preaching when viewed from a distance. The strength of Quakerism was at the motionless center of the revolving wheel. Many examples could be taken from *The First Publishers of Truth* of men and women, whose names are often not mentioned in Quaker histories, who gathered little groups together “to wait upon the Lord in silence” even though “there was none to speak words.”⁹ These passages are selected to show that even in the earliest days when the Quaker movement was growing faster than it has ever grown since, there were many meetings for worship held in complete silence, a condition much dreaded by some Friends today.

II

But in view of all this, how was the Quaker movement propagated? In *The First Publishers of Truth* we find this description of the beginning of a meeting in Cornwall:

The first that came into the County was our ancient and faithful friend, George Fox, being accompanied with Edward Pyott of Bristol and William Salt of London and their manner was to enquire for the honest and well inclined and those that were of good report whose desires were to fear God. The first they were informed of was Edward Hancock, Thomas Debell and Thomas Mounce who received them very thankfully; and died in the Truth.¹⁰

The account goes on to tell of other “honest and well inclined people” who were convinced at later meetings.

George Fox and those with him were forthwith confined in Launceston Gaol for a year, but others came and meetings were held in one home after another with the same group which gradually grew larger. At last we read:

Soon after this came down Thomas Curtis, whose labor was much amongst us encouraging friends to faithfulness. By this time we were pretty many gathered in this place to sit down in silence and wait upon the Lord, and we had many good and comfortable seasons and meetings at this time, where we felt the alone Teacher nigh us administering to our spiritual wants...¹¹

This procedure in propagating Quakerism and setting up new meetings is cited again and again in *The First Publishers of Truth*. Two or three Friends go into a town or village. They enquire who there would be most likely to sympathize with them. At that time there were throughout England countless seekers who had withdrawn from the existing religious sects and were waiting for some one who could give them a genuine prophetic message. Others had, perhaps less definitely, shown their dissatisfaction with the religious groups to which they belonged. The travelling Quakers, finding out by enquiry who these persons were, gathered them in some hospitable home. A meeting was held beginning with a period of silence followed by a spoken message. Other travelling Friends came later and gathered the same group or a larger one until finally a meeting was "settled," to use the word most often applied to a meeting which had become well established.

That an enquiry was made by the travellers is not always mentioned. Sometimes it seems to have been made by the host at whose home the travellers were entertained as may have occurred in the following instance:

About the year 1658, it pleased the Lord to

send his ministers and servants, George Bewley and James Myers, here, who were kindly received by Charles Peters and his wife and lodged in their house, where they had several meetings and several were convinced of the blessed truth.¹²

The account then goes on to give the names of later visitors who came “confirming, settling, and comforting of others.”

Often the travelling Friends were directed to likely hosts by persons at a distance who knew the locality, for example:

The first Friends that came to Canterbury was John Stubs and Willm. Caton, who came from Dover on the 7th day of the week and were directed by Luke Howard unto Henry Rogers who with his wife did receive them.¹³

A delightful little book entitled *Some Memoirs of the Life of John Roberts* was first published in 1725 after which it passed through frequent editions. This John Roberts was able by his wit to confound persecuting bishops without antagonizing them. His son, Daniel, thus writes of his father’s first contact with Quakerism:

In the year 1665, it pleased the Lord to send two women Friends out of the north to Cirencester; who, inquiring after such as feared God, were directed to my father, as the likeliest person to entertain them. They came to his house, and desired a meeting. He granted it, and invited several of his acquaintances to sit with them. After some time of silence the Friends spoke a few words, which had a good effect.¹⁴

The meetings continued after the travelling Friends had departed. Later when the bishop asked John Roberts if

he went to church he replied "No." The church, he said, came to him, which much confused the bishop.

These quotations indicate the most important method by which the Society of Friends grew in the early days, a method which can be and has been used today. Friends do not necessarily need to lament the absence of orators able to sway multitudes. Many of these first publishers of Truth were simple uneducated men and women. We know this because one of the questions sent out by the Yearly Meeting in London in 1676 asked about their "trade and qualifications."

Today a Friend might go into some town where by enquiring he could discover who might be interested in hearing the Quaker message. Or, as happens more often, he may be living in the town or just moved into it and discover that he has a concern to try to start a Friends' meeting. He might look for someone of Quaker ancestry or a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation or the Wider Quaker Fellowship or some kindred group. Or he might simply gather together a few seekers, for there are certainly as many seekers today as there were in the 17th century. Inviting such persons to his home or the home of one of them and holding a Friends meeting, or perhaps starting only with a social gathering or study group might in time prove to be the beginning of a settled meeting, as has often been the case during the past few decades. It is not unusual for a meeting to set off a new meeting by assisting some of its own members who live at a distance to gather a meeting in their immediate neighborhood.

One difference between the 17th century and today is that, because of the greater religious fervor of that time, when people's main interest was focused on religion, there were many more Friends travelling about. *The First Publishers of Truth* mentions as many as 200 who were instrumental in setting up meetings.

When my family and I lived at Mills College in California, there sojourned with us an English Friend named Frederick Sainty. He was spending two years or more in America hunting out isolated Friends in areas where there was no meeting and getting them together. He was a simple man who had come out of the labor movement, but his devotion overcame all difficulties. Each day he read the Bible to us and on the final morning of his visit, after a stay of six weeks, he read the fourteenth chapter of Acts which ends with the words “and there they abode a long time with the disciples.” Our young children felt this message to be eminently applicable.

When we were collecting the group which eventually became the “Pacific Coast Association of Friends” and later Pacific Yearly Meeting, we made enquiries in many directions. Alumni lists of American and British Friends schools were consulted. Some eastern meetings kept track of their members or former members living on the Pacific Coast. Contacts were sometimes accidental as in one case when a letter was sent to a person no longer living. The postmaster of the town in which he had lived examined the letter, noted its purport and sent it to a Friend of whom we had never heard who became an active member of our group.

Quaker meetings like all real organisms generally start with a small germ cell. Again referring to the early days of Quakerism which we so frequently look back upon as better than our own, and to be sure, in some respects they were, we find accounts of little meetings of only three or four attenders. Richard Davies (1635-1708), the apostle of Welsh Quakerism, writes:

When we were come to the number four, it was with me, that we ought to meet together in the name of the Lord, ...but none of us had a house of his own to meet in. We determined therefore to meet upon a hill...¹⁵

Quakerism in Ireland began in the home of William Edmondson (1627-1712), the apostle of Irish Quakerism. He writes:

My brother being convinced of the Truth; ...my wife, he and I met together twice a week at my house; in a while after four more were convinced, and then we were seven that met together to wait upon God, and to worship him in Spirit and Truth.¹⁶

There is evidence to show that when meetings were small, but large enough perhaps to fill the living room of a farm house, Quakerism was more vital than later when large meeting houses were built and speaking in meeting was more likely to be confined to those able to address large numbers. Friends who have a concern to start a meeting today should know that generally the meeting will remain small for several years before it begins to grow. In colonial days on the American frontier, Friends had a strategic advantage in being able to start with a very small group; usually it consisted of only one family. This sometimes grew unexpectedly, partly because there was as yet no other place of worship in the neighborhood.

III

Returning now to our main thesis; more is required than words to produce a true conviction. There must be a genuine synthesis of silent worship and the spoken word. A few quotations from the earliest Journals will make this clear.

John Gratton (1641-1712) after trying all sects and opinions finally came to a Quaker meeting:

After some time I heard of a meeting at Exton, at one widow Farney's house...I went to it and found divers Friends were come many

miles...There was little said in that meeting, but I sat still in it, and was bowed in spirit before the Lord, and felt him with me, and with Friends, and saw they had their minds retired, and waited to feel his presence and power, to operate in their hearts,...and though few words were spoken, yet I was well satisfied with the meeting. And there arose a sweet melody, that went through the meeting, and the presence of the Lord was in the midst of us...¹⁷

Thomas Ellwood (1639-1713) after listening to an argument between his father and some leading Quakers and attending a family meeting at the home of his neighbors the Peningtons, went himself to a Quaker meeting, which

...was like the clinching of a nail; confirming, and fastening in my mind, those good principles, which had sunk into me at the former [occasion]. My understanding began to open, and I felt some stirring in my breast, tending to the work of a new creation in me.¹⁸

It was the meeting rather than the argument which convinced him, though the argument started him on his way.

Richard Davies, who has been already referred to, says that he

...went first to the house of John Millington, where many Friends resorted...much brokenness of heart was among us, though but few words. We waited to feel the Lord among us...When the first day of the week came, we went to a meeting at W. Panne's at the Wild Cop, where we had a silent meeting, and though it was silent from words, yet the word of the Lord was among us. It was a

hammer and a fire; it was sharper than any two edged sword. It pierced through our inward parts, it melted and brought us into tears, that there was scarcely a dry eye among us; the Lord's blessed power overshadowed our meeting, and I could have said that God alone was master of that assembly.¹⁹

Thomas Wilson (c. 1654-1725), who travelled widely in the ministry, making two journeys to America, gradually left "the wilderness of men's doctrines, creeds, articles and outward forms" and came to see "that what was to be known of God was manifested in man, about which time," he goes on to say,

I went unto an evening meeting of the people called Quakers...and after sitting some time in silence, a Friend began to speak, directing and exhorting to an inward waiting upon the Lord in faith, to receive Power from him over every unclean thought...smiting upon my breast [I] said in my heart, this is what I greatly wanted...The Lord's Power arose in the meeting, and fell mightily upon me, to the breaking and tendering of my heart...²⁰

Instead of using the word "conversion," Friends made use of the word "tendering." The opposite of tender was "brittle" or "hard," not unlike the modern colloquial equivalent "hard boiled." To be tendered is to become sensitive, open, not only to the leadings of the Spirit but also to the needs and conditions of other persons. For example John Burnyeat writes: "I found that as my heart was kept near the Power, it kept me tender, soft and living."²¹

Benjamin Bangs (1652-1741) was plagued by wandering thoughts. "What is the matter," he writes, "that I cannot be master over my own mind." Advised by his mother to go to a

Friends meeting he tried it:

I now saw my business was, to get into inward retirement, hoping thereby I might get to be somewhat master over my own mind. Being thus closely engaged, before the meeting broke up, I got to a sight of the possibility of obtaining what I was then deeply engaged for, and this answered the end of my coming to the meeting; and I could then have wished that it would hold longer.²²

Attendance at a second meeting resulted in his conviction and in his dependence upon a power beyond himself. "Sitting for mind control" is a common term for silent meditation in the Orient.

George Keith, who became an ardent defender of Quakerism and later turned against it, wrote of the Friends:

...Some of their chief proselytes have published in print that after this manner was their conversion, viz., neither by words, sound of voice, nor sight, nor any bodily touch, but simply by a feeling of the mighty power that exerted itself the first time they came into these silent meetings.²³

Perhaps enough examples have been given to show what appears to be the case, that most individuals came into the movement as the result, not only of spoken words, but of the living silence in which God's presence was felt. In no other way can converts be made to a type of religion which ranks the inward as primary and the outward secondary. But, it will be asked, how did those who "settled" the first meetings for worship themselves come to Quakerism when there were no meetings? One answer is that many of them, like George Fox himself, came to Quakerism alone as a result of their own individual insights and a careful reading of the New Testament. In the

Commonwealth period many sects and opinions flourished. These are sometimes designated today as “radical Puritanism” or “radical Protestantism.” To a certain degree they approximated the Quaker position. However it is inexact to classify the Quakers as “radical Puritans” in view of the violent controversy between them and the “radical Puritans,” Bunyan, Baxter, Owen and others. In the preface to his *Bibliotheca Anti-Quakeriana* (1873), Joseph Smith says, “The greatest adversaries the Society had to contend with in early days, were the Nonconformist Divines.” But many radicals found that the doctrine of the primacy of the Holy Spirit, that is, the belief in inward experience as the starting point of all true religion, carried them fully into the Quaker movement. Their own insight, New Testament accounts of the development of the early Christian Church, and perhaps some early influences from the Anabaptist movement on the Continent²⁴ brought them to this position.

Fox became the nucleus around which these earnest souls gathered. He was the organizing genius who, with the help of his immediate “faculty,” as he called them, succeeded in devising a type of church government which prevented a religion based on inwardness from degenerating into anarchy. When Fox came north to Balby in Yorkshire in 1651 he found a group who were not seekers, but were already finders.²⁵ Chief among them were Richard Farnsworth, Thomas Aldam and his wife Mary, John and Thomas Killam and their wives. A little later he discovered James Nayler and William Dewsbury. These persons were, next to Fox, the leaders of the Quaker movement in the north. They all appear to have come to the Quaker position independently of Fox.

James Nayler (1612-1660), for example, says, in his examination before the magistrates in 1653:

I was at the plough, meditating on the things of God, and suddenly I heard a voice saying unto

me, Get thee out from thy kindred and from thy father's house. And I had a promise given in with it. Whereupon I did exceedingly rejoice that I had heard the voice of that God which I had professed as a child but had never known him.²⁶

This direct knowledge of God was all James Nayler needed to become a Quaker. William Dewsbury, one of the most notable of the early Friends, writes of a pre-Quaker experience:

I lay waiting for the coming of Christ Jesus, who, in the appointed time of the Father, appeared to my soul, as the lightnings from the east to the west, and my dead soul heard his voice, and by his voice was made to live...²⁷

In *The First Publishers of Truth* we find an account of Richard Hubberthorne, a leader among the Westmorland Seekers:

About the latter part of the year 1652, did Richard Hubberthorne, from Yealand in Lancashire, in the drawing of the love of God, come to Countersett, in Wensladale, to the house of Richard Robinson, who gladly received him, [he, Hubberthorne,] being already convinced of the blessed Truth, for he had been under deep travail of Spirit after the substance of religion some years before, and hearing at a distance what G. Fox preached for doctrine, he joined with it in his mind, and went abroad to some meetings...²⁸

This resulted in his settling a meeting in that area where he “stayed some weeks.” John Banks (1637-1710) writes:

...I received the knowledge of God, and the way of his blessed truth, by myself alone in the field,

before I ever heard any one called a Quaker preach;
and before I was at any of their meetings.²⁹

John Barclay (1797-1838) wrote of Alexander Jaffray (1641-1726), Provost of Aberdeen, member of Cromwell's Parliament and one of the Scottish Commissioners to King Charles II:

When first he heard that God had raised up a people in England, directing all to his pure light, Spirit and grace in their own hearts, as the most sure Teacher and Leader unto all Truth, religion and worship; his very heart did leap within him for joy.³⁰

John Barclay continues in regard to the group in Aberdeen to which Alexander Jaffray belonged, that they experienced "the remarkable work of convincement which had been going on in their hearts for several years" until William Dewsbury appeared in 1662 to persuade them to "take up the cross" though as "bitter as death," that is, to come out openly for what they believed and suffer the severe consequences. It would be possible to mention many more cases of prominent Friends who arrived at Quakerism independently, as for example Edward Chester (1633-1707), who "was convinced of the blessed Truth by his own fireside as he sat alone,"³¹ before he discovered Friends.

In a number of cases recorded in *The First Publishers of Truth* and elsewhere, whole groups of persons who had given up the established forms of religion were holding meetings, very like Friends meetings, with no prearranged program and with occasional periods of silence. It seems probable that the Quaker type of worship grew out of such gatherings of seekers. All that these groups needed was a message from some prophetic personality to tell them what it was they were seeking and already finding.³² Charles Marshall records in his Journal:

In those times, which was about the year 1654, many were seeking after the Lord; and there were a few of us that kept one day of the week in fasting and prayer. When this day came, we met together early in the morning, not tasting anything, and sat down sometimes in silence; and as any found a concern on their spirits and inclination in their hearts, they kneeled down and sought the Lord; so that sometimes before the day ended, there might be twenty of us might pray, men and women, and sometimes children... To one of these meetings... came dear John Audland and John Camm, messengers of the everlasting God. And by John Audland's powerful ministry, committed to him by the Lord, I was reached and turned to the Spirit of God...³³

The number of individuals and of groups who became Quakers in this way was probably small in comparison with those who were convinced in Friends meetings for worship by the living silence and the words of public Friends. There were, of course, many who were first "convinced in their understanding" in one way or another before they were brought further. Robert Barclay writes:

Though thousands should be convinced in their understanding of all the truths we maintain, yet if they were not sensible of this inward life, and their souls not changed from unrighteousness to righteousness, they could add nothing to us.³⁴

Yet being convinced in one's understanding was an important first step, a fact acknowledged by the early Friends in the extraordinary amount of printed material they issued to convince the unconvinced and to defend themselves from their detractors. In 1708 John Whiting published a catalog

of Quaker writings of the first fifty or so years containing about 3,000 titles by 440 writers. This represents more than one book or pamphlet a week. A rough estimate would set the total number of copies distributed at between two and a half and four million. This is an extraordinary number when we consider that for most of the early period the printing of Quaker literature was illegal. Quaker printers could not secure a license. At the risk of fine and imprisonment they kept their presses moving. Most meetings agreed to take a certain number of each book or pamphlet.³⁵ Many books were distributed on the continent of Europe in German, Dutch, Danish, French, Spanish, Latin and even some in Hebrew and Arabic. The Quaker movement began in London with two women distributing George Fox's pamphlet addressed "To all that would know the Way to the Kingdom whether they be in Forms, without Forms, or got above all Forms."

The following passage is quoted from the writings of a Friend first attracted to Quakerism by a book. Samuel Crisp (1670-1704), began by believing all Quakers to be fools or madmen. He writes:

...as I had occasion to be one day at a book-seller's shop, I happened to cast my eye on Barclay's works; and having heard in the country, that he was a man of great account among the Quakers, I had a mind to see what their principles were...I took Barclay home with me, and read him through in a week's time...There I found a light to break in upon my mind, which did mightily refresh and comfort me...weeping for joy that I had found so great a treasure, I often thanked him with tears in my eyes...So I immediately left the communion of the Church of England, and went to Gracechurch Street Meeting.³⁶

In the following century Stephen Grellet (1773-1855) was early initiated in Friends' ideas by the perusal of William Penn's "No Cross, No Crown," Though he had to look up almost every word in his dictionary, he read it through twice.³⁷ For Jonathan Evans (1759-1839), the same book proved a turning point in his early life.³⁸ More such instances could be cited.

The writers of prefaces to the collected works of deceased Friends warned their readers against expecting to find in them the "learning of the schools." This was true even of such learned writers of prefaces as William Penn.³⁹ It was the learning of the heart which was to be sought after, a learning which written words alone could not convey.

There were some who were first drawn toward Quakerism by witnessing the patient endurance of persecution by the early Friends. A number of Journals mention how the writers were first impressed by seeing the Quakers meet openly at the time of the Conventicle Act while other sects met secretly. Oliver Sansom complains that the others "play at Hide and Shrink."⁴⁰

This same Oliver Sansom (1636-1710) was first turned toward Quakerism by reading a book by Isaac Penington but he feared to come out openly. After some time his attitude changed. He writes:

And now, persecution coming fast on, and many Friends being in prison, and sufferings growing sharp and great in most places; I could no longer keep back, or conceal myself: but a necessity came upon me to come forth, and show myself, and take my part and lot with the sufferers...Thus were the bonds and sufferings of faithful Friends made a means to confirm, and embolden me to profess the Truth...⁴¹

From there on, Sansom's Journal is an almost

continuous story of his judicial trials, fines, and imprisonments. Fines were never paid by Friends; therefore goods were seized by the authorities often to many times the amount of the fine.

Other ways might be mentioned by which early converts came into the movement. Luke Howard noted the first sign of his incipient Quakerism when, as he writes, "the singing of psalms in rhyme and meter was a lie in me and a mock service to the Lord." The same recognition convinced Samuel Fisher, a clergyman who first gave up singing in his congregation and later became one of the most learned defenders of Quakerism. There were many others who discovered they could not sing words which did not express what they felt.⁴² Friends had no objection to singing in the meeting for worship or elsewhere if the words were a genuine expression of their feeling.⁴³

In the Journals one can find exceptional cases of conversion to Quakerism, as for example that of Gharret van Hassen (1695-1765), a Dutchman, who, wandering about London, went into a Quaker meeting house and was brought into Quakerism by a fervent prayer in a language he did not understand. A century later a somewhat more typical case is that of Thomas Shillitoe (1754-1839) who writes:⁴⁴

I then forsook the Foundling Hospital chapel, and other places of worship which I had frequented, and kept solely to the meetings of Friends, on First-day mornings. But my motive for this change was not a pure one; my chief inducement being to meet my young relation, and afterwards go home to dine with him...

Inviting visitors home to dinner after meeting is sometimes effective though the motive should be one of pure hospitality. Thomas Shillitoe continued his attendance at meeting and became one of the most prominent Friends

of his generation, a visitor to kings, czars, and presidents.

Though historical precedents are interesting and suggestive we must not look back with nostalgia to the good old days when the personalities whom we have been taught to revere drew seekers into the Society of Friends. Most of those who "settled" the meetings were ordinary unlearned persons who could state the simple Quaker doctrine of the Inward Light in simple terms with words which took effect after the heart and mind had been prepared by silent waiting. A maid-servant, Mary Fisher, when, after her long, perilous journey, she addressed the Sultan of Turkey, began with a period of silence which led the Sultan to suppose that she was afraid to speak. She was an uneducated girl who had earlier gone to Cambridge and made the scholars there exceedingly angry by denouncing as useless their theological training. As a result she was cruelly whipped.

The early Friends found it convenient that they had some learned members, Penn, Barclay, Fisher, Claridge and others, to answer critics on theological grounds, but this learning was of small advantage in winning adherents to their movement. Not learning, but inward experience, was the basis of their movement, though the importance of right belief was never minimized.

IV

But are there seekers in our country today, as there were in 17th century England? Now as then, there are many to whom the Quaker type of religion would not appeal. But there are indications that the time is ripe for a Quaker type of religion, under whatever name or organization, to experience a renewal of life.

Quakerism in America reached its numerical climax about 1800. It declined rapidly in the next century. This decline was partly due to separations which afflicted other

religious groups as well as the Society of Friends and for similar reasons. The rationalistic, scientific temperament which appeared in the 17th century (Isaac Newton was a contemporary of George Fox) was in the nineteenth gaining the upper hand. It appeared at first to be inconsistent with an inwardly directed type of religion. Friends did not repudiate science, which, like their own religion, was based on experience. There were more scientists among Friends in proportion to their numbers than in any other sect,⁴⁵ but they did not consider science primary. Leading Quaker scientists, among them Sylvanus P. Thompson and Arthur S. Eddington, have pointed out that science, far from opposing Quakerism, tends to reinforce its attitudes. Nevertheless the increasing activism of the nineteenth century and the growing belief that science was the deliverer which would bring in the desired Utopia turned attention away from the Life of the Spirit within. The laboratory replaced the church as source of the most important truth, and many believed the laboratory to be the only reliable source of truth.

This belief in progress through science alone is still predominant but there are dissenting voices. It is becoming clear that science is a tool which can be used by wisely directed men for constructive ends, or by misdirected men for destructive ends. Mankind is now in terrible fear of destruction through science. Science is a means for accomplishing certain ends, but it has nothing to say as to what those ends should be. Medical discoveries can save life, but they can not tell us why life should be saved. Today more effort and wealth is lavished on the means of destroying life than on the means of saving life. Some top-ranking scientists have shown that science can deal with only a portion of human experience and that there are large areas which lie beyond its scope. The poet, the prophet, the mystic have as certain a road to their kind of truth as the scientists have to their kind of truth. Absolute proof is as

impossible in science as in religion. The growth of such conceptions opens the way to a Quaker type of religion and many are seekers along this way. The failure of reliance on the outward, whether in religion or science, may induce men to turn to greater dependence on the inward.

Another opening for such a quest results from new and revolutionary ideas about the nature of man, theories new to science (if depth psychology can be called a science), but as old as the human race to prophet and mystic. This is the recognition that man's psychic life is only partly self-conscious, that beyond the threshold of his consciousness there is a boundless deep of which he is unconscious, but which is of primary importance in forming his character and determining the ultimate goals and meaning of his life. From beyond this threshold of consciousness come intuitions, feelings, inspirations, even hunches, to use a less proper word, which have more power in determining action than has self-conscious rational thought. These incursions from beyond may be good or evil, but the evil is often that part of the conscious self which has been unconsciously suppressed and rejected and the good lies deeper, formed in man's long upward journey from primitive life by influences beyond himself. And deeper still, according to some psychologists, is the One Life in which we all share, the Vine of which we are all branches, through which we are aware of our brotherhood with all men everywhere of whatever race or religion.

William James, a pioneer in this field, wrote in 1902:

We have in the fact that the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come, a positive content of religious experience which, it seems to me, is literally and objectively true as far as it goes.⁴⁶

This is as far as he could go as a scientist. The unseen or mystical world is a real world, since it produces real effects, often more real than the world of sense, because more intimate. Out of it come our ideals and those ideals more truly express what we really are than any other part of ourselves. James does not hesitate to call the Source of those ideals which come to us from beyond and through this region by the name of God. Jung also, the most far-seeing of living psychologists, finds God in the depths of the soul as the ultimate source of that power by which we are regenerated. Yet neither James nor Jung pretend to carry us as far as does our own religion.

Friends are sometimes called upon in meeting to “center down” or “dig deep,” that is to get beyond the self-conscious, rational, tool-using part of ourselves to that region of the Self where the voice of God can be heard and the presence of God felt. All that Friends have said about the Inner Life of the Spirit is consistent with the most modern trends in psychology, though psychology can never be religion, nor can it take the place of religion. Here another door is opened to the Quaker type of faith.

A third tendency of our time which might indicate that a new door has opened for Quakerism is the increasing interest in the religions of the Orient. The Society of Friends is a Christian society. The early Friends took great pains to answer from the New Testament the host of books written by their opponents with intent to prove that Quakers were not Christians. But there is an important connection between Quakerism and the religions of Asia through a common interest in the development of the inward life of the Spirit.⁴⁷

When I went to Japan in 1936 to look for myself at Zen Buddhism, I felt, while attempting to meditate with others in the meditation hall, very much as I feel in a Friends' meeting. I was particularly impressed with the character

of the *roshi*, or teachers, who might be thought to correspond with those whom Friends used to call “recommended” or “approved” ministers. The *roshi* and the Quaker ministers of a generation ago seemed alike in the spontaneity and sincerity of their words, in their lack of affectation and even in their somewhat sly humor. Of course there are important differences, but living from within out, as one follows one’s inner leading, rather than from without in, when one follows the conventional opinions of society, produces everywhere the same type of person. If the Quakers are right in believing that God has given some measure of His Light to every human being, then perhaps the “formless Self” of the Zen Buddhist can be thought of as in some sense similar to the Inward Light of Quakerism. That Quakerism results in a higher degree of social concern than does Buddhism, may be due to identification of the Inward Light with the Light that shone in the face of Jesus of Nazareth, a belief which compels an effort to obey, not only the Christ Within, but also the words of the historical Christ as recorded in the New Testament. The Sermon on the Mount is a call to action as well as to an inwardness which enables the pure in heart to see God. Zen in America is different from the Zen of Japan because of the absence from it of the extreme self-discipline practiced in the Orient, but nevertheless its popularity is another straw which may show in what direction the wind of the Spirit is blowing today.

But these three tendencies do not by any means give a complete explanation of why there are so many seekers today who, like the seekers of the 17th century, cannot find what they seek in the larger traditional forms of religion. These time-honored forms meet the needs of many, but not of all. Some desire to go beyond the arid moralism which affects so many sermons even in Friends meetings. They want to bring into harmony the springs of Life deep within and the routine affairs of outward life. This longing

may be felt only vaguely. It may not be consciously known. Men seek, often without realizing it, to know what they are and what may arise from the depths of their own being to give meaning and direction to their life. A Friends' meeting may or may not lead them to this knowledge, which is indeed knowledge of God. Certainly time and self-discipline are required to open the door to the sanctuary. As Paul truly says, we are temples of the living God. Silent, effortless waiting with a mind completely open, not only to what may be heard within, but also to what may be heard from without, however unhelpful this may appear to be, will direct the seeker toward his goal. George Fox writes in one of his epistles:⁴⁸ "And your Growth in the Seed is in the Silence, where ye may all find a Feeding of the Bread of Life."

Notes

1. This *Light* was the *Light of Christ*, often referred to by a personal pronoun.
2. Luella M. Wright, *The Literary Life of the Early Friends*, 1932, pp. 162, 204.
3. George Whitehead, *Christian Progress*, 1725, pp. 10, 11.
4. Edward Burrough, *Works*, 1672, "An Epistle to the Reader," first published as introduction to George Fox's *Great Mystery*.
5. *Ibid.*, Francis Howgil's Testimony, p. 4 (unnumbered).
6. *Letters, etc., of Early Friends*, 1841, p. 13.
7. John Burnyeat, *Journal*, 1839 ed., p. 159.
8. Luke Howard, *Love and Truth in Plainness Manifested*, 1707, p. 29.
9. *The First Publishers of Truth*, 1907, hereafter referred to as F.P.T., p. 63.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
14. Daniel Roberts, *Memoirs of John Roberts*, 1852, p. 9.
15. Richard Davies, *Journal*, 1877 ed., p. 36.
16. William Edmondson, *Journal*, 1774 ed., p. 15.
17. John Gratton, *Journal*, 1805 ed., p. 86.
18. Thomas Ellwood, *Journal*, 1714 ed., p. 53.
19. Richard Davies, *Journal*, 1877 ed., p. 30.
20. Thomas Wilson, *Journal*, 1728, p. 4.
21. John Burnyeat, *Journal*, 1839 ed., p. 171.
22. *Friends Library*, IV, p. 218.
23. George Keith, *The Magick of Quakerism*, 1707, p. 51.
24. R. Barclay, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*, 1877, Chaps. II-VI.
25. William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, 1912, p. 58.

26. James Nayler, *A Collection of Sundry Books and Papers*, 1716, p. 12.
27. William Dewsbury, *Friends Library*, II, pp. 225-226.
28. F.P.T., p. 307.
29. *Friends Library*, II, p. 9.
30. Alexander Jaffray, *Diary and Memoirs*, 1856, p. 197.
31. *Friends Library*, III, p. 71.
32. F.P.T., 52, 54, 124, 244. Howard Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, pp 8-10.
33. *Friends Library*, IV, p 128.
34. Robert Barclay, *Apology...*, Prop. XI, Section VII.
35. George Fox, *Journal*, Cambridge ed., 1911, I, p. 266.
36. *Friends Library*, XIII, p. 154.
37. Benjamin Seebohm, *Memoirs of Stephen Grellet*, 1860, Chap. III.
38. William Bacon Evans, *Jonathan Evans*, 1959, p 30.
39. John Whitehead, *Written Gospel Labours*, 1704. Preface by William Penn.
40. Oliver Sansom, *Remarkable Passages...*, 1710, p. 194.
41. *Ibid.*, p 11.
42. Thomas Wilson, *Brief Account...Life and Travels*, 1728, p. 2. John Gratton, *Journal*, 1805 ed., p. 36. William Dewsbury, *Friends Library*, II, p. 224.
43. Approving references, George Fox, *Journal*, 1901 ed., I. 32, 37, 172, 406, 473. II, 111.
44. Thomas Shillitoe, *Journal*, 1839 ed., I, p 3.
45. A. Ruth Fry, *Quaker Ways*, 1933, Chap. XII.
46. William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902, p. 515.
47. For a discussion of this relationship and its limitations see Pendle Hill Pamphlet 93, Howard Brinton, *Quakerism and Other Religions*.
48. George Fox, *Epistles*, 1698, no. 181, under date 1659.